The Death of Virtue:

Charlotte Dacre's Critique of Ideals of the Feminine

by

Tania Viegas-Monchamp

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

© Tania Viegas-Monchamp 5 January 2006

Abstract

At the turn of the nineteenth century in England, the Gothic novel was extremely popular for its stories of ghosts, mysterious circumstances and of course, the “damsel in distress”. These novels depicted such women as virtuous heroines, women whose chastity, perseverance in the face of adversity (often brought about by a threatening male figure) and innocence made them models for female readers. However, such depictions of female virtue encouraged readers to associate positive female behaviour with suffering. Charlotte Dacre, writing in the early 1800s, choose to challenge these beliefs by writing about heroines who attempted to understand and control their sexuality and their lives, regardless of societal mores. However, while Dacre writes of such women, her heroines always end up punished in some way, condemned to a life apart from the outside world by being shut away in convents, or succumbing to death. Comparing Dacre’s work to novels by Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis reveals her important contribution to English literature from a feminist perspective; however, it is conceded here that Dacre ultimately cannot envision women who can free themselves from accepted beliefs of virtue. Her heroines’ destinies seem the same as those of her contemporaries: to suffer. Still, her courage in writing about such heroines makes her a remarkable writer, and important to a feminist study of Gothic literature.

Table of Contents

Abstract..page 2

Acknowledgements...page 4

Introduction...page 5

Chapter 1

The Unknowable and Disallowed:

The Prohibition of Sexuality for Gothic Heroines..page 12

Chapter 2

Failed Motherhood:

The Powerlessness of "Virtuous" Mothers in the Female Gothic..................page 44

Chapter 3

Violent Ends:

The Murder of Virtue in the Female Gothic...page 63

Conclusion...page 80

Bibliography..page 84

Acknowledgements

I feel I have come away from my experience at the University of Manitoba as a better writer and researcher than I was at the end of my Bachelor's degree, and that I am more than just a student, but someone who can contribute to the study of literature. This is thanks to the direction and encouragement I have had while studying with the many professors I have met while doing my master's coursework.

But there is a difference between the guidance needed in the classroom, and the support needed while working on a thesis. Thesis writing and research is a very lonely job, involving many evenings and weekends sitting in a corner of a library, surrounded by books and photocopied papers. If I wasn't trying to make sense of scholarly arguments, I was trying to make sense of my own thoughts and feelings about a subject that seemed to become more complicated the longer I thought about it.

In all that confusion, to have an advisor who could direct me along the way was invaluable. My many thanks go to Dr. Pam Perkins, who answered my questions, read my work numerous times, and continually prodded me to think longer and harder about what it was I was *really* trying to say.

Introduction

This thesis will focus on Gothic literature of late-eighteenth and early nineteenth century England, and specifically on the work of Charlotte Dacre. My goal is to show how Dacre differed from her contemporaries in her fictional depictions of the "virtuous" woman. When I refer to "virtue", I mean the ways women were encouraged to behave by English culture. Beliefs about proper codes of conduct for women were circulated in medical treatises, conduct books and literary fiction of the period. What I specifically plan to explore here is how women were encouraged to act in their romantic relationships with men, and as mothers. By contrasting Dacre to two other prominent writers of her time, Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, I will argue that Dacre made her heroines sexually liberal in comparison to other writers of the period. Particularly, Dacre's heroines attempted to pursue sexual relationships with men, while Radcliffe and Lewis seem to have difficultly imagining women (at least, imagining good women) wanting such relationships. Secondly, I will show that Dacre worked to undermine popular ideas of female conduct by creating "virtuous" female characters that are parodied or destroyed in her texts. However, while I argue that Dacre attempted to envision non-traditional Gothic heroines, I will also concede that Dacre's work fails to envision such heroines as succeeding in their narratives--in other words, none of Dacre's heroines are allowed a "happy ending". All of Dacre's stories end in tragedy. Her heroines, while important to a feminist study of Gothic literature because of their attempt at sexual agency, all suffer and end up either dead or confined in convents. It would seem that Dacre, like her contemporaries, cannot imagine women in her culture having sexual agency.

My reason for contrasting Dacre to Radcliffe is that Radcliffe was so well respected and widely read during her lifetime. Radcliffe's immensely popular *The Mysteries of Udolpho* "was a

'must' or 'required reading', for anybody who had any pretence at all to being a person of education, or culture, or even of popular reading habits" (Dobrée 1). It is likely that Dacre read Radcliffe's work, and that the approbation of Radcliffe's heroines, as evidenced by her fiction's popularity, might have been something Dacre wished to respond to. Radcliffe's work makes a useful contrast to Dacre's because Radcliffe's heroines are asexual creatures; they never admit to having a sexual impulse. Their relationships with men are purely chaste and romantic, never crossing the boundary into sexual expression. Meanwhile, Radcliffe's anti-heroines are sexual, a trait that Radcliffe seems to attribute to greed and even madness. It would seem Radcliffe subscribes to the idea that sexuality and "virtue" are mutually exclusive.

Meanwhile, Dacre's heroines are anything but virtuous. This is especially true of her heroine Victoria in the novel *Zofloya, Or the Moor* (1806), a story which delved into the more violent side of Gothic in the vein of Matthew Lewis, where sexuality and depravity prevail.[1] Dacre's other novels, written more in the Radcliffean strain with their heavy reliance on a romantic plot, were still different from the traditional romantic Gothic novel. Dacre's heroines had sex outside of marriage, had affairs while married, had children out of wedlock, and, in the case of *Zofloya*, schemed and committed murder. By making these women the focus of her texts, Dacre invites the reader to experience the world through the eyes of women who are not asexual or passive, even asking the reader to understand and sympathize with their feelings. Meanwhile, Radcliffe's sexual characters are always anti-heroines, only included to act as a negative example

[1] Matthew Lewis's work, while garnering Lewis much negative attention, was quite influential in Gothic literature and is credited as part of the reason the Radcliffean romantic Gothic gave way to a form "infused with real horror, the gruesome, the macabre" (Dobrée 12). Lewis's *The Monk* is often referred to as "horror" Gothic, while Radcliffe's work is written in the vein of "terror" Gothic. These descriptions are based on Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), which equated experiencing terror with reaching a sublime state, a kind of transcendence, an understanding of the greatness of God and the insignificance of humanity. Horror, meanwhile, had a negative effect, as it did not provide the same edification to the person experiencing it, and was therefore of less value than terror. See Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1971.

of feminine behaviour. By contrasting Dacre with Radcliffe, I hope to show that Dacre attempted to imagine heroines who experience and acknowledge their sexual feelings, and who struggle with those sexual feelings--perhaps a more realistic look at feminine behaviour than what was being circulated in most fiction at the time.

I am contrasting Dacre and Matthew Lewis because Dacre was clearly influenced by his work, something she openly admitted (even though his fiction was considered scandalous[2]). While the plot of her novel *Zofloya* is based on Lewis's text *The Monk* (1796), her work departed from his in some important ways. Lewis's work imagined a sexually licentious male, while Dacre placed a female in the same role. In making this choice, Dacre completely "reverses the gender stereotypes so rampant in the traditional Gothic formulas" seen in her contemporaries' work (Dunn 308). While Lewis's male protagonist regrets his actions and blames others, Dacre's female character never apologizes for what she does. Also, while the heroine of *Zofloya* does suffer for her actions, she is never made out to be a demon, something that Lewis does with the sexually desiring female of his text. By making this choice, Dacre asks the reader to consider the possibility that women are not always either the stereotypical chaste Radcliffean heroine or evil anti-heroine. Dacre's women are not two-dimensional, but are complex characters who feel and reason.

This thesis will look at three of Dacre's novels, *Confessions of the Nun of St. Omer* (1805), *The Libertine* (1807), and *Zofloya.* Each text presents a very different heroine. The

[2] Lewis's reputation after the publication of *The Monk* was ruined, so much so that other writers feared to be associated with him. One example of this is found in a letter from Samuel Coleridge to Mary E. Robinson. Robinson had requested if she could include one of his poems in an anthology of works being published in honour of her late mother, a collection that would also include works by Lewis. His hysterical response was: "I have a wife, I have sons, I have an infant Daughter—what excuse could I offer to my own conscience if by suffering my name to be connected with those of Mr. Lewis...I was the occasion of their reading the Monk...Should I not be an infamous Pander to the Devil in the seduction of my own offspring?" (Gamer 1050). Considering this was the reaction to Lewis's work, Dacre's insistence that she be associated with him perhaps reflects her wish to not be considered among the ranks of "respectable" writers.

heroine of *Confessions* struggles with her own sexuality, particularly with her attraction to a married man. While she does many of the things that would have been considered amoral by contemporary readers, including having a child out of wedlock and committing adultery, she is still presented to the reader as a sympathetic character. *The Libertine*'s heroine has two children out of wedlock, and spends most of the narrative chasing down her licentious lover. This text is of interest to me because its heroine's virtue is parodied, pointing out the problems inherent in women's devotion to unreasonable conventions of feminine conduct. In *Zofloya*, the work most discussed by scholars, the heroine has sexual relationships with more than one man (and never thinks twice about it), even murdering to gain access to her sexual prey. I will compare the heroines and anti-heroines of these novels to those found in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1797) and *The Italian* (1796), as well as in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*. I will show that Radcliffe and Lewis both seem unable to imagine a heroine who has sexual feelings. Radcliffe's heroines simply never have sexual experiences; the characters that pursue sexual relationships in her works are anti-heroines. As for Lewis's text, sexually desiring females are either severely punished or demonized.

In my first chapter, I contrast the *Confessions* with Radcliffe's *Udolpho.* Specifically, I look at the different ways the two heroines deal with their own sexuality, and what this means. I open the chapter with a summary of ways female sexuality was discussed in the period, showing that the era's medical literature revealed a fear of female sexuality. The society believed women's sexuality should be reserved for the marriage bed and for producing children, and that women, thought to be inherently licentious creatures, needed to keep tight control of their sexual appetites. The effect of these beliefs manifests itself in both texts, but in different ways. I explain that in *Udolpho*, Emily St. Aubert is encouraged to keep her emotions under control, a message

that I believe is based on the society's need to control female sexuality. Because of this, Emily St. Aubert seems incapable of admitting to sexual feelings, even having trouble speaking about her emotions with her lover, Valancourt. However, the men in the text take sexual freedoms that allow them power over Emily's body. They either pursue her themselves, or force their male friends on her. Emily's inability to act sexually seems linked to her inability to defend herself from predatory men. In the end, it becomes clear that Emily is without power over her own body in the text, because men take that power from her.

In contrast, Cazire Arieni, the heroine of *Confessions,* thinks and speaks quite openly about sexuality and the reasons for the choices she makes regarding men. Cazire does not succeed in having positive sexual relationships, however, and ends up being as powerless as Emily. Cazire finds herself choosing a partner for financial security, and certainly not for reasons of personal fulfilment. But, the fact that Dacre writes a text centred on a sexually feeling, thinking female is extremely important, as it provides an example of a sexual female to readers that they would never find in Radcliffe's texts.

In my second chapter, I look at ideals of motherhood. Specifically, I explore the ways motherhood is portrayed in fiction of the period, and in what ways women were encouraged to be "good" mothers. I begin with a discussion of psychoanalytic theory, where I briefly explain the concept of pre-oedipal mother-daughter bonds. Some scholars use this theory as a basis for their work in the female Gothic, where it is argued that the mother and heroine often share a close, even sexual bond. However, I also look at contrasting work that claims Gothic literature chooses to break the bond between mothers and daughters, and that this broken bond becomes the catalyst for the Gothic plot. Using these contrasting theories, I discuss how motherhood is depicted in both Radcliffe's *The Italian* and Dacre's *The Libertine.* In Radcliffe's work, the

virtuous mother is absent for most of the heroine's life, only appearing briefly to aid her daughter who has been kidnapped and held in a convent. While some scholars argue the two share a romantic bond, Radcliffe's "good" mother is mostly unavailable, and therefore of little help to her daughter. In Dacre's text, the heroine never has a relationship with her daughter, and manages to alienate her son. Yet, she is also depicted as virtuous; the text's narrator continually encourages the reader to think of her as saintly. However, her saintliness, manifested in her ability to suffer, is carried to such extremes that it becomes difficult to take the narrator's claims seriously, and in the end, it is evident that the heroine is an utter failure as a mother. My goal in this chapter is to show that virtuous, good mothers are also ineffectual mothers in these texts, and that virtuous motherhood is unfortunately linked to severe suffering and self-sacrifice on the mother's part. However, this suffering, I hope to show, does nothing for the children that the mother suffers for, or for herself. While Radcliffe may not have realized that she depicts the virtuous mother as a failed mother, Dacre seems to critique ideals of feminine virtue by showing that the ideal of the mother as suffering victim creates women who are actually incapable of mothering.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I compare Lewis's *The Monk* to Dacre's *Zofloya.* Both texts have similar plots; however, Dacre inverts Lewis's plot so that it is a female who is sexually aggressive and commits murder. Both texts seem to parody the traditional virtuous female, portraying her as weak and innocent to the point of stupidity. However, there is one important difference between both texts. The women in Lewis's text who have sex also suffer, either succumbing to madness or to a grisly death. Lewis's anti-heroine, the sexually aggressive Matilda, is not even human but a demon in league with Satan. Lewis seems to feel that women who have sex must be in some way punished or destroyed. Meanwhile, in Dacre's *Zofloya,* the

female characters' sexuality is not the main reason for their destruction. An important example is the character of Lilla. Lilla is a virtuous female who is destroyed simply because she lacks sexual knowledge, not because she gains it. By contrasting these two novels, I argue that Dacre again shows her disdain for the innocent heroine, and that she does not punish her female characters for their sexuality in the way that Lewis does. Dacre centres her plot on a sexual woman who is the subject, not the object, of sexual fantasy and pleasure, an aspect many scholars have argued is the most important of her work.

My conclusion will discuss what I have learned in the course of writing this thesis, particularly how my expectations changed throughout the process. I will discuss the discoveries made in each chapter of the thesis, and what these discoveries mean to a feminist study of Gothic literature. In particular, I will focus on how Dacre differed from her contemporaries by attempting to create sexual female characters in a world that feared female sexual agency.

Chapter 1
The Unknowable and Disallowed: The Prohibition of Sexuality for Gothic Heroines

The focus of this first chapter will be the portrayal of female sexuality in Gothic texts of the late eighteenth century. Specifically, I wish to examine how a Gothic heroine's value is based on her ability to deny her own sexuality. At the same time, to be a fallen woman was to have sexual desires and to indulge in those desires. This concept of virtue seems to be based on ideals of female sexuality circulating at the turn of the nineteenth century in England, ideals that appeared in fiction, as well as in conduct books and medical texts. These texts advocated a kind of childlike innocence and meekness as standards of feminine behaviour, standards borne from a fear of the implications of women exploring sexuality and passionate emotion.

I will focus this chapter on Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1797) and Charlotte Dacre's *The Confessions of the Nun of St. Omer* (1805). Radcliffe's heroine is the quintessential model of female virtue, having a romantic relationship with a man that does not cross the border of affection into sex. Dacre's heroine, however, has relationships that stem from sexual desire, and she eventually indulges in these sexual relationships. The differences between these two heroines, and what becomes of them in the novels, reveals something of how both Radcliffe and Dacre reacted to concepts of femininity in their culture. While Radcliffe seems to uphold the conventional ideal of the Gothic innocent, Dacre asks what the possibilities are for a woman who does desire, and who acts upon that desire. The answer will be bleak: for women who attempt to have sexual agency, there are very few options save disgrace, punishment, and banishment from society.

Novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century reveal how proper female sexual conduct was perceived. Sexuality was restricted to the domain of marriage for women, at least women who wished to consider themselves modest and genteel. In courtship, the most a

woman could admit to feeling for her lover was sincere affection, or “esteem”, as Emily St. Aubert so often words it in Radcliffe’s *Udolpho*. To admit to sexual feeling made a woman infamous; relationships between men and women had to maintain a degree of innocence and reserve. Since the female was to remain reserved concerning her emotions, the male was expected to initiate the relationship. In *Udolpho*, as well as in other fictional texts of the period, the male pursued his love by watching her, perhaps spending time around her home and other places where she would usually be seen. Eventually, he would make himself known to either herself or her family. She is a passive object of this game of courtship: she is the one who is watched and who is courted.

In her study of eighteenth-century fiction’s depiction of English polite society and constructions of female beauty, Laura L. Runge notes that in addition to being a physical property, beauty “was constructed as a mode of conduct, visibly perceived in the expression of modesty, cheerfulness, gentleness, and passivity” (2). In relationships between men and women, women were to show their civility through their ability to restrain desire, and in doing so would, it was believed, encourage men to behave in a proper manner, curbing their tendencies to violent aggression and sexual licentiousness. The result of these relationships, however, is that “Men learn to ogle--in other words, to watch and discriminate--while women learn to decorate themselves and to be seen” (7). Meanwhile, women who were sexually aggressive were chastised by polite society, since “voluptuous beauty…threaten[ed] to seduce the male viewer and hence undermine the state” (9).

Julie Shaffer writes that once a woman was married, she was restricted to the boundary of her husband’s bed, while it was expected that her husband might fall victim to another woman’s charms and be promiscuous. Because a woman’s role as wife was to bear heirs for her husband,

she couldn't be as sexually adventurous as a man, for fear of confusing the business of passing along her husband's estate. Shaffer explains, "a women's sexuality…was very literally the "business" of her father [and] the "business" of her husband. Her sexuality affected the estate, finances, and social status of her family" (109). It is evident here that there is a double standard in terms of men and women's sexuality. Polite women were to encourage men to curb their licentious behaviour, but this assumption made women responsible for the proper behaviour of both sexes, leaving men without responsibility. This seems to have led to a more lax view of men's ability to restrain themselves sexually than was allowed women. As Adriana Craciun notes, while "the Enlightenment had naturalized sexuality, seeing it...as part of "the economy of nature", sexual expression was reserved for straight men" (120).

The assumption that women should control their sexuality seemed to manifest itself in a kind of paranoia of what would happen if women *were* allowed sexual freedom. An example of this can be seen in some of the era's medical literature. Sexual feelings, and in fact, sexual disorders, were believed to be produced when a woman's imagination was influenced by inflammatory ideas, as explained in M.D.T. Bienville's *Nymphomania, or A Dissertation Concerning the Furor Uterinus* (London 1775). In this influential text, Bienville explained that the female sexual imagination was fired by bad romance novels, and warned that women were "monsters in human shape [who] abandon themselves to an access of fury". Women who indulged in their sexual appetites, once in the later stages of their disorder, would undergo "a physiological transformation, the brain's fibres becoming lax and penetrable by sensual desires, the clitoris growing "larger than in discreet women"" (Craciun quoting Bienville 121), and the reproductive organs becoming "swollen and infested with tapeworms, tumors or abscesses" (122). If these were the ideas being circulated by men, it is understandable why women would

feel unable, and perhaps even afraid, to publicly admit to feelings of desire. Feelings of chaste affection were obviously much safer than sexual thoughts.

Because women were expected to play the role of the passive object of men's desires, I would argue these same women felt unable to defend themselves from unwanted suitors, and did not know of any safe way to express their own sexual feelings. In *Udolpho*, Emily St. Aubert does admit to having feelings for Valancourt. However, these feelings are restricted to affection: she never has the freedom to express her emotions as openly (or even as violently) as Valancourt or her other suitors. Emily is also unable to stop the unwanted attention of men, particularly Montoni's friends. Her only option seems to be resisting such oppression by hiding in her room and hoping Montoni will protect her. However, these men seem to have the power to pursue Emily for as long as they desire, even after she denies them. More than once, Emily finds herself with a suitor who is uninterested in listening to her when she refuses his advances. In a world where men are allowed sexual choice, and women are not, this is the way of things. All Emily can do is hope to resist successfully until she is rescued by an appropriate suitor.

In *Confessions*, Dacre creates a heroine who is quite different from Emily St. Aubert. Dacre's heroine Cazire is comfortable discussing her thoughts about sexuality with her lover, Fribourg, admitting to her sexual feelings in a way that Emily never could. But Dacre's experiment of creating a sexually adventurous female sadly leads her nowhere, because Dacre must admit that Cazire is still subject to the same cultural values as Radcliffe's Emily. Cazire is severely punished for the choices she makes in pursuing men. While Dacre attempts to imagine a female character with sexual agency, she is forced to concede that such choices for women cannot exist. After a series of misfortunes, her heroine is eventually banished to the confines of a convent, for there is no other space for her in the world.

Ann Radcliffe -- The Mysteries of Udolpho

From the very beginning of Radcliffe's novel, Emily is encouraged to control her emotions. Even when Emily is still a child, St. Aubert worries about his daughter, whose sensibility "added grace to beauty, and rendered her a very interesting object." However, he "had too much good sense to prefer a charm to a virtue; and had penetration enough to see, that this charm was too dangerous to its possessor". He teaches Emily "to reject the first impulse of her feelings" (5). St. Aubert educates Emily in the sciences and arts, for "the vacant mind is ever on the watch for relief, and ready to plunge into error, to escape from the languor of idleness" (6).

St. Aubert's fear is that his daughter's sensitivity, if left unchecked, will lead her down a path of dishonourable or even dangerous behaviour; in other words, Emily needs to learn early how to control herself. Upon her mother's death, St. Aubert reiterates his belief in the importance of self-command when he sees Emily in tears. He tells her that self-control "preserves us in the various and dangerous temptations that call us from rectitude and virtue, but as it limits the indulgences which are termed virtuous, yet which, extended beyond a certain boundary, are vicious, for their consequence is evil. All excess is vicious" (20). The specific evil that St. Aubert refers to here remains vague, as is the "error", referred to in the previous quote. But I would argue that the "evil" St. Aubert speaks of is defined later on in the novel in the behaviour of anti-heroines Madame Cheron and Lady Laurentini. These two women do not control their emotions at all, leading them to what contemporary readers would consider inappropriate conduct. They are ambitious--greedy for money and prestige in the case of Madame Cheron, and lustful, murderous, and ultimately mad in Lady Laurentini's case. For both women, sexual impulses are the root cause for their licentious behaviour. Madam Cheron's relationship with Montoni leads to her death, while Lady Laurentini's sexual relationship leads her to jealousy and murder. As

Dianne Long Hoeveler explains, these two women are depicted in the novel as corrupt and are severely punished for their crimes. “These women represent the anti-thesis of the feminine bourgeois ideology,” she writes. “Their extreme libidinous emotions, adulterous passions and lusts, and intense desire for power and status doom them to a life of desperate and thwarted designs” (*Gothic Feminism* 60). St. Aubert’s insistence that Emily curb her emotions seems to echo the fears of Bienville’s writings about women who indulge in their sexual fantasies--women who become monsters--women like Madam Cheron and Lady Laurentini. St. Aubert seems to believe that a good education would fill Emily’s mind with thoughts other than sexual ones, and a repressed emotional state would ensure she not have an excess of dangerous thoughts. Her emotions, principally her sexual emotions, would need to be kept in check if she were to become a respectable and valued member of society.

St. Aubert’s warnings work well, for Emily restrains herself with the man she loves. Romantic feelings on both Emily and Valancourt’s part are “chastely” depicted; there is none of the voluptuousness of diction that readers find in Dacre, since Dacre was much more comfortable with sexuality in her novels (and in her heroines) than Radcliffe. While Emily and Valancourt do no more than cry in each other’s arms and hold hands, Dacre’s depictions are much sexier. When Cazire is kissed by her lover, Fribourg, she tells the reader, “His lips dwelt on mine with trembling ecstasy” (3.141). Dacre’s characters often “tremble” or “burn” with desire. The boundary between affection and sexuality is crossed more than once with Dacre, but never with Radcliffe.

When it comes to the courtship of Emily and Valancourt, even though the same restraint is used in the depiction of the couple’s physical closeness, there is still a difference between how the two are able to express themselves. While Valancourt seems free to communicate the

violence of his emotions, Emily's feelings seem to be restricted to the free flow of her tears, but not her words. One of the first moments we see Emily restrain her speech is in the scene where she and Valancourt first speak of their feelings for each other. In reality, it is Valancourt who does all the discussing, for Emily is quite paralyzed in the face of her attraction to Valancourt. Valancourt begins the conversation by reminiscing about their travels while Emily's father was still alive. The reader is told that "as he spoke…there was often a tremulous tenderness in his voice" (105). He finally says to Emily, "Let me, however, …venture to declare the admiration I must always feel for your goodness—O! that at some future period I might be permitted to call it love!" While Valancourt is able to speak of love, initiating the possibility of a courtship between them, "Emily's emotion," the reader is told, "would not suffer her to reply" (106). Not discouraged by her silence, Valancourt asks if he can see Emily again. She is incapable of answering him:

> Emily made another effort to overcome the confusion of her thoughts, and to speak. She *feared to trust the preference her heart acknowledged towards Valancourt*...For though in this narrow period she had observed much that was admirable in his taste and disposition, and though these observations had been sanctioned by the opinion of her father, they were not sufficient testimonies of his general worth…this made *her fear the partiality of her judgment*…he had solicited only for a distant hope, *and she could not resolve to forbid, though she scarcely dared to permit it*; at length, she acquired courage to say, that she must think herself honoured by the good opinion of any person, whom her father had esteemed (emphasis mine 106-107).

The narrator admits that Emily is literally afraid of her sexual feelings and is torn as to whether or not she should permit such emotions to be fed with further visits from her lover. She has no

faith in her own judgment of a sexual partner, and she is only comfortable admitting her "esteem", which she feels is sanctioned by previous comments made by her father. While she is unable to speak, "Her eyes, however, reflected all the emotions of her heart" (108). Without being able to find a voice for her emotions, Emily can only show her passion through looks and tears.

On the other hand, Emily is fully capable of voicing her denial of sexual relationships when she finds herself cornered by an unwanted suitor. When Montoni tries to force Emily into a relationship with Count Morono, she is clear with both Montoni and Morono that she has no interest in a relationship. She repeatedly rejects an alliance with the Count, and pointedly tells Morono, "It is sufficient for me, and for you, sir, that I repeat my late declaration; let me hope this is the last time it will be necessary for me to repeat it—I never can accept the honour of your alliance" (200). Since sexual feelings and relationships are unsafe for her, Emily, as a virtuous woman, finds denying such relationships easy to do. Emily is clear when voicing her denial of sexuality; it is when she wishes to pursue sexual feelings that she finds herself speechless.

Radcliffe reinforces Emily's sexual virtue by contrasting her with amoral women, which for Radcliffe means women who have passions, and who dare to indulge openly in those passions. Emily's aunt, Madam Cheron, is an example to the female reader of how *not* to behave. She is the exact opposite of Emily--she speaks (too much) and has sexual desires, a fact made evident by her courtship with Montoni. She is not passive in this courtship, but clearly encourages it. But not only is Madam Cheron comfortable pursuing relationships with men, she is also "coarse and unfeeling" (112); it is clear she lacks an emotional attachment to Emily, or any sympathy for her situation. This is interesting in a study of feminine behaviour, since it seems women are encouraged on the one hand to subdue their emotions and behaviour, yet, they

must also fear becoming callous. Cheron's sexual feelings seem to be equated with her insufficient emotional responsiveness. The reader's introduction to Madam Cheron is foreshadowed when St. Aubert warns his daughter of the dangers of excessive sensibility; he makes a point of warning Emily not to be overly sensitive, but also not to become unfeeling. He tells her, "though I would guard you against the dangers of sensibility, I am not an advocate for apathy. At your age I should have said *that* is a vice more hateful than all the errors of sensibility, and I say so still. I call it a *vice*, because it leads to positive evil" (80). It seems appropriate that St. Aubert makes these comments in the same conversation as he tells Emily of his sister Cheron, for she will be an example of this "positive evil".

Madam Cheron is an unsympathetic character from the moment the reader meets her. When Emily writes to her of St. Aubert's death, the narrator tells the reader, "From her aunt she received an answer, abounding more in common-place condolement, than in traits of real sorrow" (88). Emily and Cheron's characters are often contrasted to each other. While Cheron's "inclinations led her into a life of dissipation, which her ample fortune encouraged," Emily "understood the full value of the education she had received from St. Aubert, for in cultivating her understanding he had secured her an asylum from indolence" (98-99). While Cheron is apathetic towards her niece's emotions, she seems to enjoy having power over her life now that she is her caregiver. The reader is told that for Madam Cheron, "the love of sway was her ruling passion, and she knew it would be highly gratified by taking into her house a young orphan, who had no appeal from her decisions, and on whom she could exercise without controul the capricious humour of the moment" (112). On one of the many occasions Madam Cheron charges Emily with inappropriate behaviour with Valancourt, Emily attempts to interrupt her "coarse speech...but Madam Cheron would proceed, with all the self-importance of a person, to whom

power is new” (110). Therefore, the woman of vice, as exemplified by Madam Cheron, is one who is apathetic, power-hungry, and pursues men. The text contrasts Emily and Cheron by showing how little Cheron could understand Emily: “She [Cheron] knew nothing of the conduct of a mind, that *fears* to trust its own powers; which, possessing a nice judgment, and inclining to believe, that every other person perceives still more critically, fears to commit itself to censure, and seeks shelter in the *obscurity of silence*” (emphasis mine 118). It seems that Emily is being praised by the narrator for fearing her own agency, while Madame Cheron, who must not posses “nice judgment”, is an example of negative feminine behavior, whose failure is associated with apathy, lust for power, and sexuality.

Lady Laurentini, or Sister Agnes, is another example of a woman ruined by her sexual impulses. She is a character who succumbs even more seriously to her sexual desires than does Madame Cheron, and Radcliffe has Laurentini fall into the worst kind of debauchery because of those desires. The life story of Lady Laurentini is one of sex and murder: “her conduct was such as might be expected, from the weakness of her principles and the strength of her passions” (655-656). Here again is the warning against emotional excess: Sister Agnes serves, like Madam Cheron, as a negative example of female behaviour. She was a mistress of the Marquis de Villeroi, but he disappears to France and never returns. The reader is told that Laurentini felt “all the *delirium* of Italian love” (emphasis mine 656). Laurentini’s indulgence in passion is linked to her eventual madness. After being abandoned by her lover, Laurentini spends days locked in her room speaking to the Marquis’s picture. Learning that he marries in France, she goes to him seeking revenge. Discovering that his marriage is an unhappy one, she is able to convince the Marquis, through “deep dissimulation and patient perseverance”, to poison his wife, Emily’s aunt (658). Once the deed is done, the Marquis is overwhelmed with remorse and wants nothing

to do with Laurentini. She too is overcome, and retreats to the convent of St. Claire, where she succumbs to madness and lives out the rest of her troubled life "a dreadful victim of unresisted passion" (659).

Laurentini's role in the text is to show that indulging one's sexual passions leads to a woman's corruption and even insanity, as seen here by Laurentini's bizarre behaviour in spending her days speaking to a picture, and her later madness at the convent of St. Claire. It would seem that her lack of restraint leads her to an unhealthy obsession with the Marquis, an obsession that is associated with her loose morals and that leads to murder. The Marquis does not return her intense emotional dependence, but instead abandons her. Radcliffe has Laurentini suffer greatly for her transgression of sexual gratification and agency. It seems sexually transgressive women must always be shut away somewhere, as we discover with Dacre's Cazire, and even Radcliffe's Olivia from *The Italian*, whose sexual transgression is no fault of her own, as she is raped. Keeping Bienville's writings in mind, which illustrate a horror of the sexual woman, we can see why Radcliffe, Dacre, and their society would feel that a sexual woman would need to be feared and locked away. Radcliffe's text seems to reflect these fears, as her female characters who pursue relationships with men are also always power-hungry, cruel, and eventually separated from the rest of society as punishment. Lady Laurentini is a woman to be pitied, but her fate is meant to instill horror in Emily (and the reader), so she may never dare follow in her footsteps. The defeated, remorseful Laurentini haunts Emily with the same advice that she had received from her dying father: "you have passions in your heart--scorpions--they sleep now-- beware how you awaken them! they will sting you, even unto death" (574). Lady Laurentini is an example to Emily, and therefore to the reader, of the dangers of a woman who pursues her own sexual agency.

While Emily might be set up by the novel as the opposite of such women as Laurentini and Madam Cheron, there is one way that Emily is similar to them: women in this novel, whether "good" or "bad", fail in their attempts at freedom or personal power. When Lady Laurentini indulges in her sexual passions, she is led into an obsessive madness that destroys her. Madam Cheron's resistance to her husband's demands lead her nowhere but to a slow, painful death. And as for Emily, while she is the example of virtuous femininity in the text, she also suffers, her demands for respect ignored.

Once Emily finds herself under the care of her aunt and her aunt's new husband, Montoni, she becomes an object of exchange between Montoni and his friends. Montoni becomes the predatory villain so central to the Gothic novel, and his friends become a succession of sexual threats to Emily. Count Morano, a man who Montoni tries very hard to "sell" Emily to, is one of the first unwanted suitors that Emily must fight off. But not only does Montoni want Emily to marry Count Morano for reasons of his own financial gain, so does her uncle Mons. Quesnal, a man who holds power over the land bequeathed to her. She writes to Mons. Quesnal in the hopes of being allowed to return to her home in La Vallée, but he prefers she marry Count Morano. It is interesting to note here, that the men who have power over Emily also threaten her sexually by forcing other men on her, if not themselves. Emily must take Count Morano as a husband, they threaten, if she is to keep the land that is rightfully hers. While she knows that "neither Morano's solicitations, nor Montoni's commands had lawful power to enforce her obedience, she regarded both with a superstitious dread, that they would finally prevail" (209). After she enquires about La Vallée, the reader is told Mons. Quesnal's "answers to her enquiries were concise, and delivered with the air of a man, who is conscious of possessing absolute power and impatient with having it questioned." (213). He writes that she will be better off financially

when she marries Morano, and leaves it at that. Emily resists being forced into such a relationship with Morano by clearly refusing him; however, the men in this novel feel no need to actually respect Emily's wishes. She is eventually whisked away to an even more remote location: the crumbling castle of Udolpho in Italy. Here she is more isolated than she has ever been, and she is certain Montoni moves the family "because he could there, with more probability of success, attempt to terrify her into obedience" (224). Here the terror of the novel comes into full effect, and I would argue it is not the terror of ghosts in a haunted castle. For the ghostly voices, the dead body that Emily believes she sees hidden behind a veil, the strange music coming out of nowhere--these are things the reader discovers have logical explanations at the end of the tale. With Radcliffe, all elements of the supernatural are always explained away (Clery 72). But there is no relief to the horrors of Montoni's reign in the house, or his drunken male friends trying to catch Emily in dark passages, or stealing into her room at night. The true terror of the novel is the constant sexual threat that Emily is unable to fend off on her own.

Morano, who has ignored Emily's clear rejection of him, steals into her bedroom through a door that only locks on the outside. This door in itself is a symbol of Emily's lack of power: she cannot lock herself safely inside, but is open to the attacks of all who wish to enter her space (or wish to lock her within it). This moment of Morano's transgression symbolizes a violation of Emily's privacy in the greatest sense, for Morano's presence in her room is fraught with sexual implications; he is taking control of her private space, and being her bedroom, this space is clearly a sexual one. Emily's rejection of Morono has no meaning in Radcliffe's world where men are able to exercise sexual control over women. When Morono enters her bedroom, he is confident in taking this power, while Emily, whose voice has already been silenced by the men around her, now discovers she also has no claim to her own body. Morano tells her she has no

hope of escape and that she can do nothing but leave with him. Emily falls silent: “Unable to reply, and almost to think, she threw herself into a chair, pale and breathless” (262). The sexualization of Emily’s body, pale and breathless, at this precise moment of her possible rape is especially disturbing. While the sexualization of the female in distress was common to Gothic literature of the period (Wright 43), I think there is more going on here than Radcliffe simply indulging in popular Gothic tropes. Emily’s body, clearly not her own, is being made readily available to the man who comes to claim it. Also, it seems Radcliffe is making this moment of Emily’s disempowerment one of sexual gratification for the reader: Radcliffe’s female audience is taking part in watching Emily disempowered, and is being encouraged to enjoy it. The sense of Emily’s helplessness is heightened by her response: “Count Morano, I am now in your power!” (265). Knowing that her words have no importance, Emily acquiesces. Luckily for her, Montoni does come to her aid, but not to protect her from rape. Instead, he is insulted that Morano would attempt to steal his “property” from him.

Both Emily’s father and Lady Laurentini warn Emily to keep her passionate emotions under control, a warning that I would argue is directly linked to Radcliffe’s (and her culture’s) fear of the sexual woman. When the reader observes how men behave in this text. However, and how Emily is ultimately unable to protect herself from sexual predators, the complexity of this rule of feminine behavior becomes evident. Women are to concede all power over their own bodies to men. In fact, it would seem that to be a virtuous female means not only to deny one’s own sexuality, but to be forced to give in to the sexual demands of men. In other words, the female’s own sexuality must be kept in control to keep her from becoming a monster, but also to keep her available as a sexual choice for men, when they so desire, on their terms. Morano is not the only one to try to force himself on Emily; she finds Montoni’s drunken friends chase her

down dark hallways, leaving her to hide in the hopes of avoiding rape. Eventually, she realizes she must secure Montoni's protection from his friends, and signs her estates away to him for this purpose. The only way Emily can protect herself from men is to side with another, more powerful man.

Perhaps Emily is somehow able to avoid rape because Radcliffe would never allow such a fate for her heroine. But while Emily is always magically saved by some twist of fate, her aunt is not so lucky. Equally interested in his wife's estate, Montoni demands that Emily's aunt sign over the rights of her lands to him, but she refuses. It is important to note the *way* in which she refuses. She is unlike Emily, who patiently declines Montoni with a tone of restraint. Madame Cheron's objections, as is her very character, are made into a joke. When she tells Emily what Montoni has demanded of her, Emily finds the whole scene comical:

> If anything could have made Emily smile in these moments, it would have been this speech of her aunt, delivered in a voice very little below a scream, and with a vehemence of gesticulation and of countenance, that turned the whole into burlesque (281).

Madame Cheron is made into an object of parody here, a woman depicted as unable to control herself, and therefore, someone to laugh at. But even Emily, who is the voice of calm reason, is no better at fending off Montoni than her aunt is. Emily's advice to her aunt is to be patient and not to reproach Montoni, as "it is to avoid that violence, that prudence is necessary", and "if you consult your own peace, you will try to conciliate Signor Montoni, rather than irritate him with reproaches" (282). But whether Montoni is calmly argued with or wildly reproached makes no difference. Neither Madame Cheron nor Emily has any power in their relationships with men. Radcliffe's text might argue that restraint is the appropriate mode of behaviour for women, but it doesn't do Emily any good; therefore, there is no form of resistance that can work.

Madam Cheron's method of hysterical complaint is, of course, made out to be a bad example of proper female behaviour, as she is punished severely for it. Montoni has his wife locked away in the east turret of the castle where she is allowed no visitors and little food, so that she "may understand the danger of offending a man, who has unlimited power" (305). Eventually Madame Cheron succumbs to a fever and dies (375), while Emily is finally able to escape. In Radcliffe's world, being "good" and behaving appropriately ironically makes no difference in terms of how effective a woman is, because ultimately, a woman has no control over the events of her life. Emily's wishes are ignored, and she spends much of her time in the solitude of her room in the hopes of avoiding the men who prey upon her. All she can do is find comfort in her patience in the face of adversity, a comment the text often makes. For example, when Montoni accuses Emily of caprice when she fears for Count Morono's life, she is shocked and upset, "yet, in the next moment, her heart swelled with the consciousness of having deserved praise, instead of censure, and was proudly silent" (270). A sense of pride in suffering is the only comfort Emily has in the text.

After being denied agency and left at the mercy of predatory men, Emily's final reward is a union with Valancount, a man who is anything but threateningly masculine. Sensitive and emotional, Valancourt is a stark contrast to the unfeeling, powerful Montoni. Diane Long Hoeveler writes that Valancourt is "emasculated" at the end of the novel, the reader having discovered that he has publicly embarrassed himself by losing all his money gambling and falling deeply into debt. Now that he is "ruined", he is a safe mate for Emily. Hoeveler notes, "A hero is not safe or marriageable until he has been made as feminine as possible" (*Gothic*

Feminism 65). Emily is now paired with a man who has lost power through a humiliating experience, making him safer as a sexual partner.[3]

The novel closes with one final piece of didactism: “O! useful may it be to have shewn, that, though the visious can sometimes pour affliction upon the good, their power is transient and their punishment certain; and that innocence, though oppressed by injustice, shall, supported by patience, finally triumph over misfortune!” (672). Emily gets all that she wants in this tale, and she is able to get what she wants, the reader is told, through perseverance. By retreating to her room in pensive silence, she is somehow able to avoid rape and having her land taken from her by Montoni (as it is returned at the end of the text). In addition, the mystery of her families’ history is revealed to her. Radcliffe ties everything up neatly for her heroine, who is rewarded with a conventional married life at the end of her tale. But a closer inspection of the novel reveals that Emily’s happiness must be negotiated in a world where she has no power and no agency: all she can do is hope that she can get what she wants. She is lucky in that she does. Charlotte Dacre’s Cazire is not so lucky, and does not enjoy the same happy ending that Emily does.

Charlotte Dacre -- Confessions of The Nun of St. Omer

Emily St. Aubert was brought up by parents who educated her properly in feminine conduct: passions were to be kept at bay, she was told, and Emily always acted accordingly. But Cazire Arieni of Dacre’s *Confessions* is introduced to the reader quite differently. She certainly has a different family life: her father deserts her mother and siblings for another woman, taking Cazire with him before abandoning her at the convent of St. Omer. Cazire often blames her father for leaving her without a proper role model, but there is one element that is more

---

[3] In chapter two of this thesis, I explore another possibility to this pairing of the heroine with an “emasculated” hero: it could be that the heroine is truly only safe with another “female”. Female-female bonds become the heroine’s way

destructive to her character than her father's bad example--her "superficial education" provided by the romance novels she read growing up. Cazire explains, "Reading was my chief delight; dangerous, though charming power, capable alike to improve or to destroy!" (62). The power of romance novels, as we have already seen from Bienville's writings, would have been considered a source of corruption. Readers are prepared for Cazire's fall into inappropriate sexual conduct, as her voracious reading of romance novels suggests she would have loose morals; an ironic message, considering *Confessions* would have been considered the worst kind of romance novel. Considering the sexual content of Dacre's text, and its moralizing warnings, it would be difficult for readers to categorize *Confessions* as either a tawdry romance or a didactic warning about the dangers of passionate feeling. The fact that Dacre attempts to warn readers about the dangers of passion, and then has her heroine succumb to this passion, might lead readers to think that Cazire is meant to be a bad example; it is as if Dacre were setting Cazire up as an anti-heroine. However, the story is all about Cazire: her character performs the structural function of heroine in the text. The novel attempts to set Cazire up as the wronged ingénue; a woman whose innocence is destroyed by reading bad novels and meeting the wrong men. Fribourg, the man whom Cazire loves, is described as "calculated to seduce even the wisest and most innocent" (3.31). Dacre is very careful never to depict Cazire as the babbling or cruel anti-heroine of other Gothic fiction: Cazire is no Madame Cheron. While Radcliffe's desiring women are made into objects of parody, or fall to such depths of depravity as murder, Cazire remains a sympathetic character throughout the text. She is a woman wronged by licentious men and the weakness of her own heart. She is depicted in this manner even as she contemplates and performs the kind of sexual transgression so feared in women by her own society.

---

of surviving an oppressive patriarchy.

Dacre's character complicates the definition of the Gothic heroine and the Gothic anti-heroine, for it seems impossible to place her in either category. But while one way to read the text is to believe Cazire is led away from the path of virtue, I would argue that the text is more complex than this. Perhaps Cazire is taken advantage of by men and led astray; or, perhaps she *chooses*, and is wholly responsible for having affairs with men. Dacre leaves this possibility open by showing that Cazire seriously considers the arguments for and against her feelings, especially for Fribourg. Dacre raises controversial philosophical arguments as part of the dialogue of her text, which makes it difficult to classify *Confessions* as an average romance novel meant purely for the reader's amusement. It may seem like a common romance novel, but the text certainly doesn't act like one. Cazire contemplates the complexities of relationships between men and women, particularly their sexuality and the role of sexuality outside marriage. The reader is therefore asked to consider these same complexities. The choices that Cazire makes in terms of her own sexuality are difficult, but she still makes those choices. Unlike Emily, who is unable to acknowledge her own sexuality, Cazire attempts to keep control of her body and whom she is involved with. Unfortunately, as the reader discovers at the end of the novel, Cazire is as powerless as Emily St. Aubert. She becomes, like Lady Laurentini, a woman confined to a convent, shut away from society, regretting her life of "immorality".

That Dacre's heroine has given sexuality serious thought is evident early in the text. Cazire meets Fribourg, a married man with whom she will share an illicit relationship. Their very first conversation is about sexuality. While Emily would blush at discussions of sensual love, especially with a stranger, Cazire seems more than willing to discuss the topic. Fribourg tells Cazire that men often tire of "their prize" once it has been won, while women, because of their "refinement and their delicacy aim at something nobler than sensual happiness--they seek to

attach the heart, and droop at finding they only interest the senses" (1:113). To this comment, Cazire has a well-thought, unabashed reply:

> I think...the reason is this: custom authorises men to seek, to obtain the gratification of his wishes--no stigma attends his conduct, no censure deters, the road lies open before him, strewed with flowers and inviting his steps; gratified almost before he can analyze his wishes, there is no room for him to refine upon them; and, led by passion, he often remains the victim of its folly. Women, on the contrary, shackled by the laws of custom, withheld by worldly prudence, and taught perpetual rebellion against the whisperings of Nature, early learn to confine their wishes to the silent solitariness of their own bosoms; they know the smallest lapse of decorum is attended with ever-lasting opprobrium, and shrinking they retire from the hydra-headed monster raised by custom" (114).

She ends her argument with, "perhaps we become better and happier than you [men] are by the law", which seems an odd comment to make after such a well-made argument. Perhaps Dacre felt she must add it to counteract the severity of what Cazire has just said, for fear of making her character too bold. Indeed**,** it might seem that Cazire's speech betrays the corruption of her nature; however, I would argue it is a moment where she makes a clear argument attacking her culture's ideals of female sexual virtue. Cazire explains what I believe is also revealed in *Udolpho*: that men are allowed sexual agency, but women, encouraged to keep passions locked away, are afraid of their own sexuality and have no power to pursue sexual relationships. These ideas are also found in the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, whose *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) laments that the perception of a woman's sexual experience affects her reputation. She writes, "But, with respect to reputation, the attention is confined to a single

virtue--chastity" (ch. 8, sec. 19). Wollstonecraft explains that men are allowed greater freedom than women in this regard, and contrary to what Radcliffe's text would have readers believe, she says the idea that a woman should be morally ruined by her own sexuality is ludicrous:

> Mrs. Macaulay has justly observed, that 'there is but one fault which a woman of honour may not commit with impunity.' She then justly, and humanely adds--'This has given rise to the trite and foolish observation, that the first fault against chastity in woman has a radical power to deprave the character. But no such frail beings come out of the hands of nature. The human mind is built of nobler materials than to be so easily corrupted; and with all their disadvantages of situation and education, women seldom become entirely abandoned till they are thrown into a state of desperation, by the venomous rancour of their own sex.' (ch. 8, sec. 20)

For Wollstonecraft, the real tragedy of women's sexuality is that it is used to gauge moral worth, a point that overshadows the woman's actual sexual needs. The result is that women do not understand their own sexuality, and only worry that any relationships they have adhere to appropriate social mores. She gives the example of a young woman who is chastised by a married friend. The young woman had sex with her lover before marriage, a point that leads her friend to treat her "with the most insulting contempt". Meanwhile, her married friend and her husband have been faithless throughout their marriage (ch. 8, sec. 5). Wollstonecraft argues that the woman's sexual impulse with her unmarried lover should not be linked to her reputation or a lack of virtue, for "vain is the scrupulosity of ignorance, for neither religion nor virtue, when they reside in the heart, require such a puerile attention to mere ceremonies, because the behaviour must, upon the whole, be proper, when the motive is pure" (ch. 8, sec. 9). Wollstonecraft seems to suggest that sexual feelings, when based upon true affection, or "pure"

motives, should not be governed by cultural ideas of right and wrong brought about by religion or theories of virtue. This idea is later repeated by Fribourg, who tells Cazire that any sexual relationship they have outside of marriage “can never be criminal...That which is not evil in its cause should not be deemed such in its effects” (Dacre 3.136). It seems likely that Dacre would be familiar with Wollstonecraft’s work, and that she could be making reference to Wollstonecraft through the conversations that Cazire and Fribourg have. This would be a bold move on Dacre’s part, for she would be associating herself with ideas that would have been considered extremely controversial to her readers. However, this would support my argument that Dacre meant her text to be read for more than amusement. While perhaps masked as a romance novel, Dacre seems to be using *Confessions* to make philosophical statements about women’s sexuality.

But the message of *Confessions* is not straightforward. Cazire does not simply ignore cultural codes of conduct, doing whatever she wishes. She struggles with her desire to be with Fribourg and her wish to be considered a woman of virtue. Dacre does not pretend that the choice for women is easy, but she does want to provide arguments against late eighteenth-century ideas of sexual conduct. While Cazire laments that women are not allowed the same sexual freedom that men are, one thing she will defend is marriage. Fribourg seems greatly dissatisfied with his own marriage, and even argues that marriage is an unnatural state for relations between men and women. As I have already noted in Fribourg’s repetition of Wollstonecraft’s ideas, the arguments he makes against marriage align him with the writings of radical philosophers of the 1790s. Fribourg has several children and has been married for six years. However, he admits that the only reason he married his wife was because “I loved Ellinor, and found no path open to my happiness but yielding a portion of my independence” (1.126). The end of his love for Ellinor has led him to wonder why he should remain trapped in an

unhappy relationship. He calls marriage a ceremony "invented by men; Nature knows it not, therefore it is contemptible," and insists that if he had his way, he would "not fix a boundary to love; I would not say, 'so far must you extend, and no further'. The sexes should be linked by affection, not law" (127-128). The opinions Fribourg voices are similar to those of William Godwin's influential *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), which argued that marriage often occurs when two young people "under circumstances full of delusion...vow eternal attachment" to each other (302). The result is that they "are reduced to make the best of an irretrievable mistake...thus the institution of marriage is made a system of fraud...so long as two human beings are forbidden, by positive institution, to follow the dictates of their own mind, prejudice will be alive and vigorous," and, "The abolition of the present system of marriage, appears to involve no evils" (303).

Fribourg is not only trying to convince Cazire that it is best to follow their natural affections, but in having this discussion occur in the text, Dacre is also taking part in a philosophical debate regarding relationships and marriage, and asks the reader to consider that attitudes toward what constituted "virtuous" behaviour *could* be wrong. Even Cazire, who argues with Fribourg over the sanctity of marriage, admits that she finds his arguments of interest: "I will confess the novelty of his tenets made me frequently dwell on them; by so doing they gradually impressed my mind, and I sometimes believed, as he had said, in my conversion" (Dacre 1:135).

Fribourg and Cazire continue to debate the tenets of virtuous marriage. It is important to note that Cazire is never made out to be a woman of loose morals: she does not jump into bed with Fribourg, nor does she accept his arguments lightly. But while Cazire is tempted to run away with Fribourg, she continues to argue with him on the subject. She tells him that marriage

is "the cement of society" and that "the incendiary who would destroy one link of a chain so fine is a traitor to society and an enemy to mankind" (191). Again, the importance of marriage as a part of the societal machine is reinforced here. There is more going on than guilt in betraying Fribourg's wife and family; Cazire feels great distress at the thought of breaking such an important cultural rule. Indeed, while Cazire is without a father or mother, she is still under the yoke of authority: the authority of the culture she lives in. She feels she *must* argue with Fribourg. Yet, after Dacre refuses both Fribourg and Lindorf, she asks herself, "What really is the nature of a ceremony to sanctify the effusions of the heart? We love *before* we marry; as far as possible we have *then* anticipated the only chance of continued happiness; will marriage ascertain it further? It is calculated only to cement an union, where affection cannot" (2.99-100). Dacre, while conscious of what her culture will think of such ideas, seems to still be making the radical argument that marriage is a ceremony only, and that true affection and sexual expression are the more "natural" modes of conduct between human beings. Also, it is important to note that sexual freedom is not only reserved for men in these arguments, but for both men and women.

After Cazire ends her relationships with Fribourg and Lindorf, she falls into a state of despair. By depicting Cazire's suffering, Dacre points out the unfairness of asking women to deny their sexual needs. Unlike Emily, Cazire cannot find solace in pride: the sole reward of knowing she is virtuous is not enough. Instead, she acknowledges that she suffers, and asks, "I had given up a selfish lover, and had retained my virtue--Wherefore then did I grieve? Could the gain be worthy of the sacrifice?" (92). Later, she says, "Reason approved my conduct, prudence justified it, and pride upheld it: but still I was not happy" (93). Cazire's self-denial, while preserving her reputation, eventually leads her into a serious depression and mental illness. The severity of her anguish is significant, and mirrors the anguish of other heroines who have

suffered the same fate in texts from the period. Thomas Kullman argues that such anguish, particularly madness, points to the futility of a heroine's pursuit of sexual virtue. He compares *Udolpho*'s Emily St. Aubert to Ellinor, a young woman who goes mad in Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1785). Ellinor refuses to enter a secret marriage with the man she loves, knowing it would anger both his and her family, and fly in the face of custom. In his essay, Kullman notes that "while self-denying acts of reason provide inner strength to Emily St. Aubert and other heroines, the effect on Ellinor is the opposite: the heroic act of self-denial endangers her mental health...The discourse of "virtue rewarded" is explicitly undermined" (173) and "the reader is invited to sympathize with weakness" (179). I would argue that this is what occurs in Dacre's *Confessions* as well. Cazire is not rewarded for her denial of Fribourg or Lindorf. There is no solace in virtue here, only suffering.

The reader might think that Cazire would be happy if she fulfilled her desires and pursued a relationship of her choice, regardless of the implications to her reputation. But here the novel takes a different turn, for Dacre cannot envision a world where a woman who pursues her sexual desires succeeds. By the end of the novel, the reader finds that just as Cazire was punished with depression and madness for trying to remain virtuous, she is punished again for denying virtue as well.

Once Cazire recovers from her depression, she meets Lindorf again. After having suffered so severely, Cazire is now open to a sexual relationship based on companionship without the marriage tie. But the relationship is short-lived; Lindorf soon tires of Cazire, abandoning her pregnant and alone with his "sister" Olivia, who turns out not to be Lindorf's sister at all, but simply his friend's lover. Like Cazire, Olivia is also abandoned. She tries to convince Cazire to be courted by her friend Count Loretti, a man with money who could be a

good provider to them both (and now that Cazire is pregnant, finding a husband to provide for her would be near impossible: she is indeed a *fallen* woman). Cazire has no interest in this man, and leaves the house disgusted. But as the reader quickly discovers, Cazire cannot survive without a man to care for her financially. Cazire finds it almost impossible to make money on her own. Finding a cheap apartment, she sells what little she has until she is penniless. An attempt to sell her poems is futile, as is finding employment. She says, "Oftentimes I believed myself on the point of succeeding, but obstacles continually intervened and marred by hopes; some glanced with supercilious eyes on my situation; others refused, with affected kindness, to employ me;--all judged harshly my conduct, and believed me culpable rather than unfortunate" (2:186). It seems no one is interested in hiring an unwed pregnant woman. Finally befriending her neighbour, Janetta, Cazire joins Janetta in her work of making nets for silk clothing. Together they are able to earn a living to take care of themselves. Here it seems Cazire may have found true happiness. She seems peaceful, even hopeful, at this moment in the text: "Oh lion-hearted independence", she thinks to herself, "'tis delightful to possess the; but to gain thee is glorious…Let me attempt thee then" (181). But this is not to be the answer either; Cazire is soon thrown in jail for an outstanding debt she owes Olivia. A callous act, certainly, but Olivia is doing what she can to protect herself. Cazire is her means of securing financial freedom in Count Loretti, and she blackmails Cazire by having her thrown in jail in the hopes that she will agree to a relationship with this man for the good of them both. And while Cazire may remain resolute in denying Count Loretti, the choice she eventually makes to get herself out of jail is the same; she succumbs to becoming a man's mistress in order to survive. Dacre's point seems to be that freedom of sexual choice is not an option for women, as financial security becomes paramount over all else.

Cazire's situation becomes truly desperate; she gives birth to her son in jail, and it appears neither she or Janetta will ever be able to pay off her debts. She is then presented with an easy solution: a lover named St. Elmer, a young man who she has known since childhood, and who invites her to live with him. St. Elmer, knowing that Cazire is at the lowest point of her life and will be easily persuaded, does his best to bate Cazire with a promise of financial security. The letter that he sends Cazire in prison tells her that a new home awaits her, one where she will have servants treat her as "a person of distinction" (3.15). Accepting release and taking the carriage awaiting her, she is brought to a villa "finished in a style of refinement and elegance that at once struck and captivated the eye" (16), and finds in her bedchamber "a costly assortment of toilet boxes. On the lid of one was written, 'For Cazire'". Upon opening it, she "beheld it full of gold" (18). What else can this be but a bribe? And in Cazire's situation, what else can she do but accept?

St. Elmer has much in common with Emily's Valancourt. He begs Cazire to admit she loves him in the same way Valancourt did with Emily. The difference here is that Cazire does not love St. Elmer: she admires, and is even in awe of him. In fact, the text emphasizes that Cazire is often ashamed to be in his presence--he is saintly, while she is the fallen woman. The superiority of St. Elmer is repeated again and again. While there may be no ghosts in this particular Gothic tale, St. Elmer seems as close to a supernatural spirit as he can be, for "he appeared in everything more than mortal" (2:99), and Cazire later says that she "adored him as a saint" (3:105). At first Cazire refuses St. Elmer's marriage proposals, hoping to live under his protection without entering into a marriage that for her would be a lie. But he becomes ill at the thought of living without her, falling upon a sofa before her with "increasing languor", hiding his feverish head in his hands. Cazire tries to revive him, but St. Elmer tells her, "Your care is

vain…unless without farther cruel procrastination you consent to become wholly mine" (60). Cazire's hopes of being able to live off St. Elmer's generosity as a friend are denied here: he will accept nothing less than free access to Cazire's body for her to benefit from his care. In a state of panic at the sight of his illness, Cazire consents to be his. Suddenly recovering, St. Elmer's response seems to echo with foreboding: "It is irrevocably sealed" (62).

Cazire lives to regret her choice in St. Elmer, for years after the two marry, Fribourg, now widowed, appears on their doorstep. St. Elmer takes Fribourg in, finding him near dead after being mugged on the street. Upon St. Elmer's invitation, Fribourg stays with Cazire and St. Elmer well after his recovery. The fact that St. Elmer insists Fribourg stay in their home, knowing Cazire has passionate feelings for him, seems cruel and unusual punishment. On the surface, the text depicts St. Elmer as a being of such perfection that he borders on sainthood or the supernatural: he is so innocent that he believes he has nothing to fear from his wife being with a man she once loved. But examining his behaviour uncovers his underlying sadistic nature. In his cruelty, his character becomes an interesting spin on the Gothic tyrant. His vindictiveness is subtle and measured: he is a gentler tyrant than Montoni, yet just as effective.

For example, when Cazire tells St. Elmer that allowing Fribourg to stay with them is "imprudent", he says he is only acting to prove his love for her, since now Cazire "will be convinced that when I mock the power of temptation…I indeed look up to you as all that is perfect in humanity" (81). St. Elmer wins Cazire's companionship by giving her the financial security she needs, and finally gains access to her body by filling her with guilt and forcing her into marriage. This final act of cruelty can be interpreted as St. Elmer figuratively dangling a carrot before her nose: he allows her former lover to live with them, and forces her not to "bite", as though he were an owner training a dog not to take food unless on command. This act has

nothing to do with proving to Cazire he loves her, but is rather an attempt to force her to learn to do as he wishes, even while knowing he makes her suffer.

Of course, Fribourg makes advances towards Cazire, which she at first rejects, but eventually she is unable to resist. Cazire allows herself to be seduced by Fribourg, and on the night the two finally consummate their passion, she is so overwhelmed with grief that she decides she must kill herself. Cazire is caught with a gun in her hand, which St. Elmer pries from her as she falls down in a stupor. She wakes to discover that Fribourg has shot St. Elmer dead in a duel, and after Cazire chastises Fribourg as a murderer, Fribourg commits suicide.

In the closing chapter of the text, Cazire finishes her tale with a warning to her female readers: "ye of my own sex", she says, never "infringe on the sacred duties of a Father", and "ye who, like myself, are wildly enthusiastic, beware how you revel in the gay delusions of fantastic sentiment…ye admit the dangerous innovations of the Passions. Believe me, destruction is their basement; and Experience comes too late" (191-192). Here is a closing very similar to the one found at the end of *Udolpho*, yet the two novels are completely dissimilar. Dacre's heroine indulges in the very sexual transgressions that Emily would never even consider. But perhaps the closing *should* be taken at face value. Dacre has presented the reader with a heroine who is able to feel sexual love for men, and who considers the implications of choosing a sexual partner not sanctioned by societies' rules of marriage. This in itself is quite different from the Radcliffean heroine. However, Dacre takes this even further by having Cazire act upon her sexual feelings, first by having a relationship with Lindorf, and then finally with Fribourg. But Dacre cannot imagine a world where her heroine can have successful sexual relationships with men. In the end, sexual choice for women is entwined with financial security and survival. In this way, it isn't even a "choice": sexuality becomes a tool for women to gain security, as in Olivia's case, or

is the payment made for security, as in Cazire's. Either way, the text shows, like Radcliffe's, that a woman is not able to have control over her own body. A woman's sexuality is not simply a manifestation of natural instinct or desire: instead, it is a commodity. Meanwhile, men are allowed sexual freedom that women aren't. Just as Emily finds herself assailed by men who would force themselves upon her, St. Elmer "forces" himself upon Cazire. And men have the sexual freedom to do as they wish without worrying about the consequences. As Lindorf tells Cazire in his parting letter, "I have been for long a voluntary slave in your bewitching fetters; but ever on the wing for new delight, ever…in search of *variegated* pleasure, I mount again her wing of *dazzling hues* and soar in quest of transports *new* and exquisite as those I *once* enjoyed with yourself" (2.154). While Lindorf is free to pursue new conquests, the evidence of Cazire's sexuality displayed by her pregnant belly marks her as an outcast and makes it near impossible to find a job and financially care for herself. She suffers while he is free to pursue other adventures. Guilt-ridden after St. Elmer's death, Cazire considers herself "a monster too horrible to live" (3.160-161), but her attempt at suicide fails. After falling into a second depression that lasts for two years, she returns to St. Omer's convent, where she spends her days in seclusion from the world she can no longer be a part of. There is no place for the female sexual transgressor in society: the convent is Cazire's hiding place and only solace. Indeed, the passions do lead, as Dacre suggests, to personal destruction.

Dacre's Cazire seriously complicates the stock character of the Gothic innocent. Dacre does, just like Radcliffe, have a didactic message that is repeated throughout her text: that for women sexual passion is to be feared. However, this message is continually undermined through philosophical arguments on the one hand, and compassion for the suffering heroine on the other. But while Dacre presents the reader with the possibility of a sexually desiring heroine, she

cannot give this heroine a happy ending. Dacre knows full well that the world she lives in could not accept such a heroine. While Cazire is never presented as being cruel or corrupt like Lady Laurentini or Madam Cheron, she suffers the same fate. She is severely punished throughout the novel for any sexual relationships she pursues. Even the marriage she has with St. Elmer can never work, as he is not her sexual choice, but only her means of financial security. In the end, Dacre knows that there is no sexual relationship that can provide unfettered happiness to the heroine. Her warnings about sexual passion ring true: beware your sexual feelings, she tells her female readers, for they cannot bring you happiness.

On the surface, it might seem that both novels agree on what makes a virtuous heroine. Emily is rewarded for remaining sexually virtuous, while Cazire is punished for her sexual transgressions. However, a closer look at *Udolpho* makes this point questionable. Because of Emily's refusal to enter a clandestine marriage with Valancourt, she almost loses him entirely. It seems rather that she is punished for this choice, for it is because she refuses to run away with him that she ends up at the castle of Udolpho. Her virtuous nature, based on her ability to be patient and to "persevere" leads her to spend her days sitting in her room, hoping that all the drunk men in the castle don't actually succeed in raping her. The fact that she does avoid rape is because Radcliffe would never allow it, not because Emily, as a character, is able to think and act her way out of Udolpho. Indeed, being virtuous does not do much good for Emily in this text.

Ultimately, Cazire does many things that the virtuous Gothic innocent should not do, and she is punished for her actions. But along the way, the reader sympathizes with her misery, is presented with arguments approving natural sexual feelings (and against popular ideas of female virtue), and is given *the opportunity* to consider something other than a sexless heroine. It is the fact that the reader is given that opportunity, regardless of the outcome of the novel, which

makes Dacre so fascinating in comparison to a writer like Radcliffe, and so important to a discussion of female Gothic literature. But it is important to also note that both writers seem unable to envision a sexual female who is not punished. This suggests to me that even the writer who would dare to envision such a desiring woman as Dacre does, is well aware that her society would never believe such a character could (or should) succeed.

Chapter 2
Failed Motherhood: The Powerlessness of "Virtuous" Mothers in the Female Gothic

The eighteenth century was a time of transformation for England, when rural life gave way to the rise of industry and the growth of cities. Cottage industries were being replaced by manufacturing, and wage labour grew along with a rising middle class. As earning a wage was considered a male pursuit, the responsibilities of women were centred upon the home and childrearing. With this emerging emphasis on the importance of a woman's role in the home, mothering became a source of great discussion and debate[4]. Susan C. Greenfield writes that by the end of the 1700s, "Increasingly, women were defined by their maternity, and maternity was supposed to occupy a woman's perpetual interest" (*Mothering Daughters* 14-15). Opinions about the nature and importance of child care and mothering manifested themselves not only in medicine and science, but also in the form of conduct books for women, and in literature. By the mid-eighteenth century,

> Mothers became the object of numerous pediatric manuals providing advice on the care and nursing of children. New attention to the management of children, and to the affectionate bond between mothers and children, idealized women's socializing and educational role over their children while recruiting those women to a domesticity associated with the national destiny [i.e. the empire] (Nussbaum 24).

A "good" mother was one who not only had an affectionate relationship with her child, "[following] the dictates of nature in sympathizing completely with [her] children" (Kipp 14), but who also instilled proper morals in her children. Anne K. Mellor notes that female Gothic writers often focus on the mother as the "educator and moral guide" for her children

---

[4] Julie Kipp makes the connection between the rise of industrial culture and the importance placed on women's domesticity in her text Romanticism, Maternity, and the Body Politic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

(*Romanticism and Gender* 83), an ideology that had become prevalent in the culture. Properly reared children would grow up to be productive members of the nation.

However, as the century came to a close, a new image of motherhood emerged: that of the excessively loving mother. The fear of such over-obsessive mothers, spoiling and suffocating their children because of their intense attachment to them, became a new concern. Mothers "serv[ed] as examples of the threat posed by natural feminine sympathies and irrational instincts". Like the fear of oversexed women destroying familial lines of descent with illegitimate children, a fear of "dangerously unchecked maternal desire" appeared (Kipp 16). It was feared that such mothers would raise spoiled, useless citizens, or worse: their love would destroy the children they cared for, or destroy themselves. The mother overwhelmed by maternal passion was dangerous to the point of madness:

> Maternity is defined as a route to the sphere of moral sentiment in the accounts of writers like David Hume and Adam Smith, but one which is marked by an impulse for self-sacrifice so extreme that it becomes a form of horrific self-annihilation (Kipp 17).

As we have already seen in *Udolpho*, a woman's ability to keep her emotions under control was of the utmost importance, for the woman who indulged in her emotions was considered dangerous. It would seem that similarly, the woman whose mothering instincts became uncontrollable was also considered dangerous to both herself and her child.

This chapter will look at motherhood as depicted in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1796) and Charlotte Dacre's *The Libertine* (1807). I focus particularly on how the texts define what a virtuous mother is (and is not), as well as the differences in the way virtuous mothers are depicted. Both texts portray evil and obsessive mothers and virtuous, suffering mothers. Interestingly, good mothers appear to be absent for most of their children's lives, while evil

mothers are always present, and perhaps too visible in the power they wield over their children. There are different reasons why Dacre and Radcliffe may have constructed their mothers in these ways. One possibility is because both books were written around the turn of the century, and both novelists would have been exposed to ideologies of motherhood circulating at the time. Perhaps both Radcliffe and Dacre would have been aware of the idea of the suffocating, emotionally-out-of-control mother. Since a mother who is too near is suffocating and destructive, an absent mother cannot be so. Or perhaps Radcliffe and Dacre envisioned such mothers for the reasons hypothesized by Ruth Bienstock Anolik, who writes that the good mother, "constructed as an emblem of...safety, unity, and order," must be absent or dead for a successful Gothic plot to take shape (27). Meanwhile, the evil mother "can be quite useful in promoting the deviant Gothic plot" as her scheming can in fact be the very catalyst, as it is in Radcliffe's *The Italian*, for the narrative action (28).

Radcliffe seems to subscribe to the idea of the self-sacrificing, suffering mother, one who disappears for the good of her child. However, Dacre seems to hold the ideal of the self-sacrificing virtuous mother in contempt. She simultaneously promotes and undercuts this ideal in her text. Her virtuous mother, Gabrielle, is continually praised by the narrative voice, but she also makes decisions that lead to her and her children's suffering, clearly illustrating her utter failure as a parent. The Gothic motif of the absent mother is complex in Dacre's text, as Gabrielle is present for one child, yet is absent for another. By having the narrator praise Gabrielle's virtue, while she clearly makes bad choices for her children, Dacre suggests that the ideals of virtue, manifested in the mother-as-martyr, are seriously flawed. Dacre's fascinating mother character in *The Libertine* serves as an example of both the mother who is present and destructive in her "love" of one child, and who is absent and useless to the other. As for

Radcliffe's suffering mother, the text may praise her as an ideal, but this very same mother turns out to be a very ineffective parent, one who in fact is no better at mothering than Dacre's.

Before I begin, I should point out that studying motherhood in Gothic literature can become confusing, as opposing ideas of mothering are presented by scholars in discussions of the very same texts. As I will show here, the mother is discussed as both suffocating to the child, something that was clearly a fear in late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century English culture, or she is seen as the woman the Gothic daughter must seek out in order to avoid a sexually threatening father figure: in other words, the mother-daughter bond is used as a way of fighting off a suffocating patriarchy. I would like to look at both viewpoints on this issue, and how these opposing ideas work in both Radcliffe's and Dacre's texts.

Ann Radcliffe -- The Italian

The mother-daughter bond is a subject of considerable interest in psychoanalytical theory, and is often used in the study of female Gothic texts. Nancy Chodorow's work has been quite influential to the psychological study of motherhood and gender. She writes of the pre-oedipal mother-daughter relationship, where the daughter considers her mother as a "first-love object" throughout most of her early life. While a young boy also experiences these feelings for his mother, his focus changes quickly. He soon sees his father as a rival for his mother's affection. Meanwhile, the daughter remains "preoccupied for a long time with her mother alone" (Chodorow 96). The daughter, being the same sex as her mother, does not feel the same differentiation from her as the son. She continues to experience the same dependence and individuation issues experienced during the mother-infant bond long after the son (97). This bond could take a sinister turn, as in the case of neurotic mothers who consider their daughters as an extension of themselves and not as individuals. Because such mothers are suffocating to their

daughters, and never perceive them as separate people, these daughters grow up experiencing themselves “as a continuation or extension of...[their] mother in particular, and later of the world in general” (Chodorow 103). This mother “love” destroys the female child’s ability to think or act independently.

The theory of pre-oedipal mother-daughter bonds seems to echo the fears of English culture, where the mother, creating an unhealthy bond with her children, destroys instead of nurtures them. In Gothic fiction, the dead or absent mother, or perhaps it is more accurate to say the mystery surrounding the dead or absent mother, can be as suffocating to the daughter as having to deal with a living, tyrannical mother. While she is not there to protect the daughter and therefore hinder the Gothic plot as Anolik suggests, her absence can be as useful to encouraging the plot as an evil mother’s schemes. “What I see repeatedly locked in the forbidden centre of the Gothic,” writes Claire Kahane, “is the spectral presence of the dead-undead mother, archaic and all-encompassing, a ghost signifying the problematics of femininity which the heroine must confront” (336). The heroine of the Gothic novel experiences an “ongoing battle with a mirror image (the mother) who is both self and other” (337). It seems the heroine must solve the mystery of her mother’s death or disappearance in order to reassure herself of the sanctity of her mother’s good character, and therefore, of her own. The mother cannot have died or disappeared under mysterious circumstances; such a fate would mean the daughter, by association, would be tainted. To solve the mystery, and discover the mother’s fate was not through any sexual impropriety on her part, assures the daughter’s good character remains intact.

However, while some scholars believe the heroine must free herself from the mother, other scholars look at the mother as a source of the heroine’s strength. The theory concerning latent sexual bonds of pre-oedipal mother-daughter relationships has been used effectively to

study Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*. In Radcliffe's text, the relationship between Ellena di Rosalba and her biological mother, Olivia, can be read as a romantic relationship because of the intensity of the bond that the two share. Susan C. Greenfield believes "relationships between mothers and daughters--as well as between women in general--are represented [in *The Italian*] as a source of romantic pleasure" (*Veiled Desire* 74). For Greenfield, the attraction that Ellena has to Olivia is much stronger than any affection she has for Vivaldi; the reader never sees Ellena desire or show sexual longing for her supposed lover (75). This should not surprise the reader of Radcliffe's fiction, as the virtuous woman would never admit to longing for a man, as we have already seen in *Udolpho*. However, Greenfield makes an interesting argument regarding Ellena's intense interest in Olivia, noting that the romantic language used to describe Vivaldi's first sight of Ellena is strikingly similar to the language used to describe Ellena's first sight of Olivia, complete with the frustration of wanting to remove the veil from the beloved's face. Greenfield writes, "the similarities between the scenes suggest that Ellena is as attracted to Olivia as Vivaldi is to her" (80).

Claudia Johnson notes how the two women blush at each other as they remove their veils for the first time: "The erotic intensity of this affect between women unveiling themselves to each other...clearly surpasses what Ellena more gingerly ventures for Vivaldi himself" (135). This attraction seems to echo the novel's tendency to avoid portraying heterosexual domesticity, instead focusing on homoerotic female bonds. Before discovering Olivia, Ellena shares a close bond with her aunt and caregiver, Bianchi. The two live together in perfect harmony, working professionally embroidering silks, and thereby earning their living. Vivaldi seems an intruder upon this happiness. Indeed, Ellena comes up with excuses to avoid marrying Vivaldi, only succumbing to his proposal once her aunt dies. And while San Stefano, with its tyrannical

abbess, is not the picture of perfect female community, the convent of Our Lady of Pity is (135). Johnson writes that this community "is a haven from the atrocity rife elsewhere precisely because of its independence from and exclusion of the world of men and the structures of patriarchal society" (136). Even when Ellena does marry Vivaldi, George E. Haggerty notes, it is only when he has been sufficiently emasculated by his frightening experience at the hands of the Inquisition. Together, she and the now-feminized Vivaldi "can establish a female-oriented sexual bond based on the kinds of protective emotionality that sadomasochistic culture would reject" (159).[5] Female-female relationships and communities in this text may represent a solution to the disempowering patriarchal world, and the female relationship that seems the most significant is that between the mother and daughter.

But given the mother's obvious importance in this text, and considering the intense bond described by Greenfield and Johnson between Ellena and Olivia, it seems strange that this mother is so ineffectual as a parent to her daughter. Olivia is constructed as the virtuous mother, having escaped the villain Schedoni's incestuous embraces to hide in the convent of San Stefano. In order to save Ellena's reputation, she distances herself from her daughter, not daring to have her visit at the convent, or indeed even know that her mother exists. All Olivia knows of the child is what she reads through correspondence with her sister Bianchi: "With Bianchi she...corresponded so regularly as opportunity would allow, and had at least the consolation of knowing, that the object most dear to her lived" (Radcliffe 443). Ellena does not even realize that Olivia is her biological parent until the end of the novel. Even then, when the two are finally

[5] Haggerty writes that Radcliffe often depicts "an alternative reading of the family: the disowned and dishonoured heroine often searches for a lost mother... In order to help her in her pursuit and to aid her in her flight, the heroine elicits the almost fraternal friendship of an emasculated young man, weak, wounded and powerless, who becomes a surrogate brother as well as a lover and delivers the heroine...into the arms of the erotically consoling mother." See Haggerty, George E. "Mothers and Other Lovers: Gothic Fiction and the Erotics of Loss". Eighteenth Century Fiction. 16.2 (2004): 157-172.

united as mother and daughter, the bond is quickly broken as Ellena becomes the wife of Vivaldi and begins a new life separate from her mother. While Olivia is constructed by the text as an example of virtue, sacrificing herself to a life of seclusion to protect her daughter, she is certainly of very little help or support to Ellena, except during the short period of time in the convent of San Stefano. The bond that the two share is protective only for a brief time; it did not exist while Ellena was growing up, and it now ends as Ellena accepts the protection of her new husband.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is Vivaldi's mother, the Marchesa. Her concerns lie in finding a highborn wife for her son, but only for the prestige and financial gain that it will bring to herself, as his interests don't concern her. Her character is a sharp contrast to that of the gentle and retiring Olivia. The Marchesa is "jealous of her importance; but her pride was that of birth and distinction, without extending to the morals. She was of violent passions, haughty, vindictive, yet crafty and deceitful" (12). Like the oversexed female who is a threat because of her libido, the violently selfish and emotional Marchesa almost destroys both Ellena and Vivaldi. It is the Marchesa who has Ellena kidnapped and taken to San Stefano, feeling she is an unsuitable match for Vivaldi. The text tells us that the Marchesa "was in a disposition, which heightened disappointment into fury; and she forfeited, by the transports to which she yielded, the degree of pity that otherwise was due to a mother" (194). The Marchesa fails as a mother, the reader is told, because she allows her passions to interfere with the caring emotions she should have indulged as a parent. The Marchesa is selfish, violent, and deceitful. She is truly a woman without virtue, and her corrupt nature is equated with an inability to properly mother her child. Her scheming almost destroys both Ellena and her son, as she nearly succeeds in having Ellena murdered, and her son is handed over to the Inquisition, from which he narrowly escapes.

In Radcliffe's text, then, the more a mother suffers for her children, regardless of whether or not she is present for them, the better a mother she supposedly is. What makes Olivia virtuous is her self-sacrifice, keeping herself separate from her daughter in the hopes that her shameful past will not reflect in any way upon Ellena. It seems Olivia's absence was necessary in order for her to be a good parent: and her discovery, once made, is sufficient. As for the bad mother, the Marchesa is too present; in fact, she is an example of the kind of suffocating mother the culture had grown to fear. She tries to orchestrate her son's fate in a way that best suits her, but does so under the guise of doing what is best for him. This is a reflection of the Marchesa's vanity and selfishness in comparison to the pious Olivia. But while the text would have the reader believe these women are both very different parents, what we have here are two mothers that are similar in their inability to parent. Since the Marchesa's scheming sends Vivaldi to the Inquisition, the reader can certainly assume her mothering is nothing but selfish and dangerous. But the virtuous mother seems to fail as well, as she is unable to be present to raise her own child. Not only that, her claim to virtue is earned at a very steep price: total self-sacrifice.

Charlotte Dacre -- The Libertine

The heroine of Charlotte Dacre's text is a mixture of the absent and present mother. Dacre's Gabrielle never knows her daughter Agnes, having left her at birth in an attempt to find her child's father. While she does find and reconcile with him, she never does return to Agnes. As for her son Felix, Gabrielle is present to raise him; however, she places his life in jeopardy when she (again) finds herself in a position where she is chasing down her licentious lover, Angelo. The reader is told that Gabrielle is patient with Angelo in the face of his infidelity for the sake of their son (and oddly, for the sake of the daughter she has abandoned). The text constructs Gabrielle as a martyr in the same way that Olivia is constructed as one: because of the

suffering both women endure for the sake of their children. But there is an important difference in how Dacre treats this kind of maternal virtue. Radcliffe's text seems to subscribe to the idea of the self-sacrificing mother, even though, ironically, Olivia turns out to be unnecessary as a parent. But Dacre parodies Gabrielle by showing that while absent, and even while present, this supposedly perfect mother is unable to have any positive effect on the lives of her children. In doing this, Dacre seems to purposely undercut the ideal of the self-sacrificing victim-as-heroine.

Even before Angelo proves himself to be licentious, the reader knows that his affection is not of the same quality as Gabrielle's. While her love is pure, the text says Angelo's is flawed: "The love of Gabrielle was such as an angel need not have blushed to know; that of Angelo, such as a mortal should endeavour to overcome" (1:57). But when Angelo abandons Gabrielle while she is pregnant with their first child, she does not criticize his fickle nature. Instead, she decides to pursue him for the sake of her baby, who she feels must have a father, particularly a father who can provide for her:

> [Gabrielle's] genuine and unsophisticated ideas of duty taught her that to ensure protection for the unconscious being she had been the means of ushering into life, her whole efforts should be directed, and no sacrifices of self be esteemed too great to achieve an end so momentous, and so simply due to the object for whom they were made. Such is the pure morality of a nature uncontaminated by association with the world, unbiassed by its contracted estimates of right and wrong (193).

Gabrielle's devotion to Angelo, regardless of his behaviour, illustrates her commitment to creating a traditional family, complete with a supportive father. It also sets Gabrielle up as a victim, a wronged woman with saintly patience who should be pitied by the reader for her heroic ability to persevere in the face of constant disappointment and anguish. The severe terms that

Gabrielle sets for herself cause her to suffer for the rest of the novel. But while the text sets her up as saintly and heroic, her actions, which she claims are taken for the good of her children, are questionable. The very sacrifices she makes places her children in the worst situations, and places Gabrielle herself in the midst of hardship. The first time that she pursues the unfaithful Angelo, she leaves her newborn daughter Agnes behind with her friend, Madame Bertrand. As the reader later discovers, this is the last time she ever sees her daughter. When Gabrielle finds Angelo and reconciles with him (after some adventures with his murderous new lover), the two begin a life together in England. They have a son, Felix, and write to Bertrand that she and Agnes should meet them so they can all live together in harmony. But Bertrand will not hear of it. She refuses to go to England, or to return Gabrielle's daughter to her, claiming that "D'Albini has not yet passed the firey ordeal,--the season of folly is not yet at an end." Convinced that Angelo will never marry Gabrielle, Bertrand explains that Agnes will be negatively influenced by discovering her mother lives with a man out of wedlock. "At this time, she is taught to respect a fond, though absent mother," Bertrand writes to Gabrielle; "her juvenile mind conceives of you the highest sentiment of which it is capable; why then would you desire, unnecessarily, to give birth to, and gradually to impress upon it, different and perplexing ideas?" (2:77). Gabrielle acquiesces, and Angelo, who already has his son, "could endure to resign, for a while...the one [child] he had never beheld" (80).

My interest in the above passage is Bertrand's insistence on leaving Agnes with a good impression of her mother. It seems that having her mother with her in the flesh is of little importance. The *idea* of her as a woman of virtue is more important than her actually being there to act as mother, as her presence would, Bertrand believes, be harmful to the child. But while Agnes grows up with visions of a kind of saintly, and always absent mother, her own family life

is disastrous. Bertrand’s husband, Boffuet, physically abuses Agnes to the point that she must flee her home. She is rescued by a couple who take her in and raise her as their own daughter, but this too unravels for Agnes, for she and her “brother” have an affair that forces Agnes to leave her surrogate family. She ends up living alone, and is almost ravished by her own father, who only releases her when he sees a locket around her neck that contains a picture of his parents, thereby revealing her identity[6]. She is finally confined to a convent (of course) by her uncaring father, who feels her relationship with her “brother” has left her defiled. Agnes knows nothing of her mother except stories that Madame Bertrand has told her, a mother that she knows as “celestial” (4:68), but nothing more. This heavenly mother is of no help to her, abandoning her to a life that quickly becomes one of hardship and ends in tragedy. The idea that Gabrielle chased Angelo down for the sake of giving Agnes a father is a farce, as she does not try very hard to include Agnes in her family.

Interestingly, the “different and perplexing ideas” that Bertrand so fears is the fact that Gabrielle lives with a man out of wedlock; or in other words, that Gabrielle has a sexual relationship not sanctioned by the bonds of marriage. This translates into loose morals on Gabrielle’s part, morals that Bertrand fears will affect Agnes. But Bertrand proves herself to be no better as a mother. After years of courtship, her marriage to Bouffet seems to be the catalyst that triggers his abusive behaviour. This is an ironic twist, considering that Bertrand seems to hold Gabrielle’s unmarried status in such disdain. But marriage certainly doesn’t do Bertrand any good (perhaps this is an echo of Dacre’s thoughts about marriage as revealed in the *Confessions*--that it is a ceremony with little meaning). Agnes’s third “mother”, the Baroness, fails as well.

---

[6] The Gothic motif of having the heroine escape rape or death by being identified by a picture kept in a locket is a common one begun by Clara Reeve and used often by Radcliffe (Knight-Roth 69). Note that she uses it in *The Italian*, as Schedoni holds off stabbing Ellena when he sees a picture of himself in a locket around her neck.

She succumbs to her husband's pressure to turn Agnes out of her home when they discover Agnes's affair with her "brother".

Here again, as in the *Confessions,* Dacre seems to be depicting women's sexual relationships as the cause for their failures. Each of these women fails in their duties as mothers because they are under the control of the men in their lives. Dacre doesn't seem to blame the women for these failings, since it is the husbands, ultimately, who disrupt the mother-daughter relationships. Even Gabrielle, if the reader believes the narrator, is not at fault for what befalls her. It is Angelo's fault, for if he had been a faithful lover and a better father, his children would have had the family life and happy, healthy mother that they needed. Dacre is unable, again, to imagine relationships between men and women as being successful and positive. All these women are powerless in the face of their husbands' demands or whims. To return to Bertrand's comments that Gabrielle is a better mother absent than present, perhaps what she says is true. Gabrielle is without power, and because of this, she fails as a mother for her children.

As for Gabrielle's relationship with her son, her presence in his life does little for him. When Felix is only a few years old, Angelo again tires of Gabrielle and leaves her for another woman. Gabrielle decides that she must make the great sacrifice of chasing him down so that her son will have a father to raise him. She says, "For my children's sake, tenfold grief and humiliation could I bear! disgrace, ignominy, and contempt, the pangs of despised and insulted love" (2:226). Why Gabrielle even refers to her "children" here is a mystery, since she seems to easily give up any claims to Agnes--whether or not she finds Angelo again makes little difference to her. And as for Felix, Gabrielle's obsession with Angelo leads her to drag her son into the depths of poverty. Gabrielle and her son end up living in the streets, penniless and starving. Gabrielle persists in her idea that finding Angelo is of the utmost importance for her

children, though chasing after an unfaithful lover is obviously not the best choice. My point in focussing on this is to show that Dacre deconstructs the ideal of the ever-sacrificing, passive woman as a "good" mother. Gabrielle believes she must make sacrifices for her children, even if that sacrifice is the humiliation of pursuing a selfish and uninterested lover. However, these sacrifices lead to her children's suffering, thereby illustrating the futility of pursing such acts of "virtue".

A second point to be made here is that while Dacre deconstructs the ideal of great sacrifice equalling good motherhood, there is another important factor at play. Gabrielle is constructed as a martyr for chasing her unfaithful lover, but she has little choice in the matter. Gabrielle's actions point to the reality of her situation: Angelo is her only means of financial support. He has money, and she does not; it is in their relationship that she is able to have a home for herself. Ironically, in chasing him down to regain financial security, she almost starves herself and her son. But if Angelo were never to reconcile with her, she still would need to find some means of support. Therefore, Gabrielle's sacrifice can be seen as more than a symbol of her virtue. Chasing Angelo down is her only option in a world where women need men's money to survive. Here again, as in the *Confessions*, the sexual relationship is one based on pure survival. But whether Gabrielle is a parody of the virtuous mother, or if she is simply a woman forced to humble herself for financial security, either way she fails as a mother. If Gabrielle is merely pursing an ideal of virtue, she fails for her children because she causes them to suffer. Or, if she is simply trying to gain financial security, she still fails because she is unable to find a reliable means of getting that security. Again, women are without power in their relationships with men, and in this case, it leads them to fail in protecting and mothering their children.

Gabrielle's mothering is contrasted to another "mother" in the text, Milborough, Gabrielle's personal servant and Felix's nurse. Milborough is eventually able to insinuate herself between Felix and his mother, and, being deeply interested in Angelo's money, plays the charming coquette to win his affection. Milborough is "treacherous, base, and diabolical [of] heart" (3:5), but as Felix's relationship with Gabrielle slowly collapses, he becomes attached to Milborough because she spoils him. This is a fascinating turn of events, because while Milborough is underhanded and greedy, teaching Felix to steal and eventually running off with both him and Angelo's money, she is at least successful in gaining his affection in a way that Gabrielle never is. And while the text seems to blame Angelo for not attending to Felix's proper upbringing, Gabrielle's presence is obviously of no help whatsoever. Felix becomes corrupt and is seduced by the evil Milborough, the reader is told, because his father left him no proper example to follow: "Thus was a fine field left open for the suggestions of ignorance and depravity; for where wisdom and virtue were not suffered to take root, the weeds of error sprang up" (3:70). The novel suggests that it is Felix's father who is responsible for his moral life, and that his mother is irrelevant.

While the narrator does not blame Gabrielle for Felix's corruption, instead insisting again and again that she is virtuous, her virtue does little to help her solve the matter of her troubled relationship with her son. Felix watches as his father begins a relationship with Milborough, one that is so public that all the servants, and Gabrielle, know it is happening. But Gabrielle, ever the meek sufferer, decides to ignore Angelo's obvious infidelity with Milborough. She patiently waits for him to see the folly of his ways, telling herself that she should "remain unshaken, to *bear* and to *forbear* with the father for the sake of the children" (58). But the irony is that her forbearance does not gain her any respect from her son (and again, her daughter has been out of

her life for several years by this point). Gabrielle's self-abnegating nature in the face of Angelo's repeated infidelity does nothing but disgust Felix, making it easier for him to side with the flattering Milborough. He is uninterested in being in the presence of his "ever-melancholy mother" (65), who does nothing but shut herself up in her chamber, "worn-out, and nearly heart-broken with ceaseless suffering and disappointment" (72). While Milborough is hardly rewarded for her actions in the text, for she ends up in an insane asylum, she is at least rewarded with Felix's affection. The text is explicit in showing that Felix has no positive father-figure, but it is also clear that he has no mother either, for Gabrielle is too pre-occupied with her suffering to forge a relationship with her child. This leaves Felix open to Milborough's flattery and corruption, and eventually to his demise. Gabrielle's indulgence in self-pity, while argued to be for the sake of others, actually becomes an act of selfishness because it takes her away from her duties as mother.

The irony found in *The Libertine* is important to note, because it is in the irony of Gabrielle's failure that she is made into an object of parody. While Radcliffe uses parody to poke fun at her anti-heroine Madame Cheron, Dacre chooses to parody her excessively *virtuous* heroine. For example, Madame Cheron is often depicted as falling into hysterics, becoming overwhelmed by her emotions to the point that she loses control of herself. Gabrielle, too, seems unable to control her emotions. An example of this is her reaction to Felix when he says he has no duty to her since she is not Angelo's wife:

> This was too much; the heart-stricken Gabrielle, uttering a faint exclamation, sprang up, her pale cheek glowing with the deepest crimson; *her soul shook within her*, and though scarcely had she the power to stand, with a *desperate* effort she summoned her receding strength and rushed *half frantic* out of the room. Scarce had she gained her own

apartment ere she fell prostrate on the floor, and insensibility gave a temporary relief to nature from pangs which with life it could not long have borne (emphasis mine 3:100-101).

Gabrielle does not show the kind of poise here that readers might find in Radcliffe's Emily, or with Ellena; the words used to describe her in the above paragraph show the weak hold she has over her own emotions. Dacre complicates her heroine by giving her traits that readers would associate with overly emotional (i.e. uncontrollable, unstable and dangerous) anti-heroines. Therefore, while the narrator insists Gabrielle is a heroine, the text continually undercuts this claim by depicting Gabrielle with negative traits.

Not only is Gabrielle's behaviour used to undermine her status as heroine, but also her frustratingly total lack of self-respect with Angelo is another way Dacre undermines her character. The fact that Gabrielle pursues Angelo after he abandons her not once, but three times, is a bit too much for readers to swallow. Even contemporary critics of the novel took issue with the text's ridiculous plotline. In an issue of the *Annual Review* of 1807, one critic writes, "Certainly if in the delineation of libertinism, Miss Dacre has not exaggerated and overcharged her picture, by unnatural representations, she has injured it by improbable ones...the incidents of this story...are far from being probable" ("The Libertine, Review "). But this frustrating behaviour on Gabrielle's part shouldn't be read simply as an "overcharged picture". Gabrielle's actions are integral to Dacre's critique of the idea that a virtuous heroine is one who must "*bear* and... *forbear*" for the sake of virtue, even when doing so is unreasonable and potentially harmful to her or her children. The implausible actions that Gabrielle takes to pursue her children's father, her illogical reason for abandoning her daughter, her son's disgust at her behaviour and her inability to control her emotions all point to the conclusion that Dacre is

undermining her self-sacrificing heroine. Gabrielle resists the female community she could have shared with Agnes and Bertrand, instead abandoning her daughter entirely. She also fails as a mother to her son because of her self-abnegating behaviour, which wins her no sympathy or respect from Felix or Angelo. In short, Dacre shows that the kind of self-sacrifice that makes a mother "virtuous" is really more destructive than anything else.

The reader is encouraged to interpret Radcliffe's Olivia as a good mother, as she is praised by the text for her self-sacrifice, a self-sacrifice that includes separation from her child. However, her absence makes her very ineffectual as a mother, for she does not play a role in Ellena's upbringing. Olivia's absence does not influence Ellena's life in the traditional sense of the Gothic tale: there is no mystery to uncover at the start of *The Italian*, as the reader simply believes Ellena's mother has died. The mystery doesn't commence until Olivia reveals herself as Ellena's mother years later (and by this time, the story is almost over). The reader is provided an explanation for what has lead Olivia to enter the convent, removing any possibility of wrongdoing on her part. But Olivia's importance is limited to the short time the two know each other before Ellena's marriage, as the bond the two discover is quickly broken.

Meanwhile, Dacre's virtuous mother is such a failure to her own children, that her character parodies the virtuous mother figure. Interestingly, Dacre does not provide readers with an example of a good mother. Perhaps this is because Dacre believes that as long as her culture equates motherly virtue with severe self-sacrifice, she cannot imagine that a successful, happy mother can exist. She also makes the important point that as long as women are financially dependent upon men, women like Gabrielle, and their children, will be at the mercy of men like Angelo. But while Dacre attacks ideals of virtuous motherhood in her text, she unfortunately also deals a blow to the idea of women having successful sexual relationships with men. Gabrielle's

difficult life and death, and the stories of Bertrand and the Baroness, all point to the problems inherent in the unbalanced relation of power between men and women. Once married, Bertrand seems to have no recourse to protect herself or Agnes from Bouffet's abuse; at least, the text certainly doesn't provide any for her. The Baroness is equally under the yoke of the Baron. Gabrielle is punished for her attempts to be with the man she loves: she is humiliated, loses her children, and dies young. So here again, while Dacre is important to a study of Gothic literature because she chooses to create heroines who actively pursue sexual partners, she fails to be able to imagine these heroines as succeeding in gaining satisfying sexual relationships.

Chapter 3
Violent Ends: The Murder of Virtue in the Female Gothic

Of all Charlotte Dacre's texts, none is so infamous as *Zofloya, or the Moor* (1806) for its violence and sexuality; it is the novel in which Dacre dabbles most freely in Gothic horror, adding an element of gore unseen in her other texts.[7] Published at the height of her writing career, the novel is almost always mentioned by scholars alongside Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), and has been identified since its publication as a kind of 'copy' of Lewis's work. *The Monk, Zofloya*'s predecessor, shocked reviewers and titillated its numerous avid readers. While it enjoyed great circulation and went into many editions, it was considered blasphemous by many of Lewis's contemporaries and dangerous for what was believed to be its ability to corrupt innocent minds.

Dacre's work enjoyed the same popular success and endured similar criticism at the hands of reviewers. Not all reviews were unfavourable: *The Morning Post*, which described most novels being published at the time as a "mass of inanity", praised *Zofloya* as a "splendid exception", providing a positive moral to readers on the dangers of the passions, and written "with the hand of a master" (Knight-Roth 49). However, both the *New Annual Register* and the *Annual Review* condemned *Zofloya* as nothing but a copy of *The Monk*, and one reviewer seemed to consider it even more gratuitous than Lewis's text. The *Annual Review* wrote

> both the style and the story of *Zofloya*, are formed on the *chaste* model of Mr Lewis's *Monk*...there is a voluptuousness of language and allusion, pervading these volumes, which we should have hoped, that the delicacy of a female pen would have refused to trace; and there is an exhibition of wantonness of harlotry, which we should have hoped, that the delicacy of a female mind, would have been shocked to imagine (Gamer 1052).

Both Dacre's and Lewis's work endured not only damning reviews, but attack from the English judicial system. After 1727, when the publisher Edmund Curll was convicted for publishing "obscene" books, any publication judged by legal authorities "to display a tendency to corrupt the morals of the general population could be suppressed and prosecuted for obscene libel" (Gamer 1046). Lewis was apparently forced by court order to change the licentious and violent original version of *The Monk* to something that the courts found more palatable. In 1798, Lewis decided to edit his fourth edition of *The Monk* and all subsequent editions. According to Michael Gamer, "Both Byron and Walter Scott in later life intimated that Lewis 'was forced to suppress' 'some of the most offensive passages' or face prosecution" (1047). Dacre, however, seems to have avoided this fate, as evidenced in an 1805 review in *European Magazine*:

> It is a remarkable fact, that while one of the most celebrated of these male authors [footnote: "Lewis, in the Monk"] has been induced, by a severe and public animadversion, to retract, at least to omit, in a subsequent edition, what he had before said; a woman (I blush to say it) has, at the age of eighteen, shamelessly avowed the most disgraceful principles; nor, like her FRIEND, has been moved by public reprehension to alter them. (Gamer 1052)[8]

Lewis had claimed authorship of *The Monk* when it went into its second edition, a move he later regretted (Gamer 1047). Perhaps Dacre, writing under a pseudonym, was able to avoid editing her text because no one knew her as the author. As for Dacre, while she may have had her critics, readers still enjoyed her tale of a murdering, sexually active heroine. *Zofloya* enjoyed wide circulation, multiple editions, and was translated into German and French (Michasiw 13).

---

[7] An exception to this would be her poems *Hours of Solitude* (1805), where Dacre at times indulges in the horror of gory detail; however, the poems are beyond the scope of this thesis.
[8] Gamer's article quotes an 1805 review of *Zofloya*, but the novel wasn't published until 1806. However, I have chosen to accurately quote Gamer's article, even with the inconsistency.

While *Zofloya* has moved out from *The Monk*'s shadow, a comparison of the two novels seems appropriate considering Dacre was clearly influenced by Lewis's work; besides the strikingly similar plot structure between her text and Lewis's, she dedicated her first novel, *Confessions of the Nun of St. Omer*, to Lewis (Dunn 308) and her pseudonym "Rosa Matilda" is a combination of the names of Lewis's cross-dressing anti-heroine Rosario/Matilda (Craciun 75)[9]. But another reason for contrasting the two texts is not only to look for similarities, but also, and more importantly, to see how Dacre departs from Lewis's story. While *The Monk* depicts a man who is murderous and lustful, Dacre writes from the perspective of a female with the same brutality and sexual appetite. These texts both touch upon the greater subject of this thesis: female virtue. Both portray virtuous female characters so similar in their looks and manners that they could be switched from one text to the other. Both texts also tend to sexualize these virtuous females, even while describing them as innocent and as asexual as children. Finally, both texts ensure these characters suffer and are destroyed by the end of the narrative, an interesting departure from the virtuous Radcliffean heroine, who gets her happy ending no matter what dangers she faces. A comparison of the treatment of these characters in both texts reveals, I think, beliefs and questions about the virtuous female extolled in texts like Radcliffe's.

Matthew Lewis -- The Monk

The anti-hero of Lewis's text is a young monk by the name of Ambrosio. He is celebrated in Madrid as a being without any fault; he is so virtuous and well spoken that his followers come from miles around to hear his services. But he is not as virtuous as he might seem, for he has one very serious flaw. Ambrosio is a kind of Shakespearian hero, a man whose pride causes him to

---

[9] Lisa M. Wilson argues that the name "Charlotte Dacre" is as much a pseudonym as "Rosa Matilda", because Dacre's real name was Charlotte King. See Lisa M. Wilson, "Female Pseudonymity in the Romantic "Age of Personality": The Career or Charlotte King/Rosa Matilda/Charlotte Dacre". European Romantic Review. 9.3 (1998): 393-420.

fall from grace. Ambrosio vainly tells himself that he is "exempted from Humanity's defects" (Lewis 41), and that his superiority has allowed him to resist temptation. Ambrosio's undoing begins almost as soon as the reader meets him. His young friend Rosario reveals himself to be Matilda, a beautiful young woman who disguised herself to enter the monastery and who has now fallen in love with him. Matilda is similar to Dacre's character Zofloya in her desire to satisfy her idol's every wish, even if it means she is intentionally setting him up with another lover beside herself. She is also similar to Zofloya in that both she and Dacre's character turn out to be other than what they seem; Zofloya is revealed to be Satan himself, and Matilda is revealed to be a demon in league with Satan, sent to Ambrosio to ensure his destruction.

Before Ambrosio is even aware of Matilda's true identity, he obsesses over her image. Matilda transforms herself to look like the portrait of the Virgin Mary that Ambrosio keeps in his room, a portrait that he fantasizes about. Gazing at the image, Ambrosio says to himself, "Were I permitted to twine round my fingers those golden ringlets, and press with my lips the treasures of that snowy bosom!" (41). When Matilda is revealed to him, and he realizes that she is the embodiment of the Virgin Mary he has so long desired, his obsession transfers from the portrait to her: she becomes the object of virginal perfection he has wanted so long to possess. She becomes even more desirable to him when she appears to nearly forfeit her life for his, convincing him that she is not only chaste, but saintly in her ability to sacrifice herself for her lover. Ambrosio finds Matilda irresistible because she appears to be what Ambrosio (and Lewis's readers) feels the ideal woman *should* be: virginal, utterly self-sacrificing, and innocent.

Unable to resist, Ambrosio finally succumbs to Matilda's charms. But once he has done so, Matilda becomes less and less attractive to him. Ambrosio only remains interested in a woman as long as she remains chaste and an object of his obsessive desire. Once he has satisfied

that desire, the object is obviously no longer chaste or innocent, and no longer of interest to him. Ambrosio cannot be attracted to Matilda now that she has sexual knowledge, and even appears to enjoy their sexual relationship. Also, Lewis seems to equate a woman gaining sexual knowledge with a change in her behaviour; an idea I had previously discussed in my earlier chapters on Radcliffe's work. Lewis seems to believe that women who pursue sexual relationships go down a path that leads them to become greedy and power-hungry. Matilda transforms from being the virtuous heroine, weak with emotion, to gaining the balance of power in their relationship. She plans Ambrosio's schemes for him, and argues with him when he appears to have a conscience. When Matilda changes from being a passive object of sexual desire to an active participant in sexual desire, she also seems to change sex (again). But this time, no cross-dressing is involved; it is Matilda's aggressive behaviour that makes her into a man:

> Left to himself [Ambrosio] could not reflect without surprise on the sudden change in Matilda's character and sentiments. But a few days had past, since She appeared the mildest and softest of her sex, devoted to his will, and looking up to him as to a superior Being. Now She assumed a sort of courage and *manliness* in her manners and discourse but ill calculated to please him. She spoke no longer to insinuate, but to command: He found himself unable to cope with her in argument, and was unwillingly obliged to confess the superiority of her judgement. Every moment convinced him of the astonishing powers of her mind: But what She gained in the opinion of the Man, She lost the interest and affection of the Lover (emphasis mine, 231-232).

As Matilda loses her innocence in sexual knowledge, she not only becomes Ambrosio's intellectual equal, but she also falls in status to become an unattractive "manly" schemer. It seems that sexual knowledge is equated with intelligence and agency here, traits that for a

woman are further equated with unattractiveness. Lewis does not encourage the female reader to follow in the footsteps of Matilda in gaining sexual knowledge. In fact, it would appear that for Ambrosio (and assumedly for his readers) the existence of women's sexuality is a *problem*. Sexual knowledge is tantamount to eating the forbidden apple: once knowledge is attained--and in Gothic texts, it seems to be always a female's sexual knowledge that is at issue--the woman loses her status as virtuous, or "good". As far Ambrosio is concerned, this sexual knowledge opens the floodgates to a woman's intelligence and agency. The result is that she is no longer devoted to her man's will; she becomes, as Ambrosio says, courageous, commanding, shrewd, and therefore like a man (and no longer desirable).

Antonia becomes the text's model of chaste perfection, and proves herself to be everything that Matilda had only pretended to be. A young woman who lives with her aunt and her mother Elvira, Antonia's purity is emphasized from the very beginning. In fact, Lewis repeatedly underlines her innocence as being childlike. Antonia claims to have no knowledge of a difference between the sexes (17), and is said to speak in "innocent prattle" (282), a term the reader might associate with the nonsensical speech of a toddler. The reader is told Antonia divulged to Ambrosio all "her *little* sorrows, all her *little* fears and anxieties" (emphasis mine, 249), as though nothing that could come from Antonia's mind could be anything but insignificant. Indeed, the only text she is said to have read is an edited version of the Bible, with any "improper" passages removed, a discovery that Ambrosio assumes to be the reason for her baffling innocence (259-60). When Ambrosio first attacks her, she is terrified, although "at what She knew not" (262), and the only reason she eventually becomes cold towards the monk is

because her mother grows to distrust him, not because she understands his attempts to seduce or rape her for what they are.[10]

Though he depicts Antonia as innocent and childlike, Lewis chooses to sexualize her adolescent body. Her lack of sexual knowledge, the basis of her innocence, places her in danger from the corrupt monk. But this is what makes her so attractive to Ambrosio. Matilda, once "sullied" by her and Ambrosio's sexual relationship, is no longer nearly as attractive as the virginal Antonia. The text promotes Antonia's sexual innocence and vulnerability as desirable traits; she is an object of sexual desire because her inexperience makes her accessible to men who would seduce her. Also, it is important to note here that her lack of sexual knowledge seems to go hand-in-hand with her childlike manner, a behaviour that borders on stupidity (as evident by the fact that she doesn't speak, but "prattles"). For Lewis, the desirable woman is one who is *powerless*, powerless due to her lack of knowledge or experience.

Perhaps in this way Antonia is not so different from the women in Dacre's or Radcliffe's texts: their heroines are certainly not stupid, nor are they so inexperienced, but they are certainly without power. While Lewis's depiction of the desirable woman is certainly more insulting, there is a disturbing trend appearing here that shows how the culture viewed proper female conduct: the proper or virtuous woman should be without power. Antonia, like Emily St. Aubert, lacks control of her own body, as that power is given to Ambrosio, and even to the reader. The reader is invited to be a voyeur of Antonia's person, to watch her in the same perverse manner as Ambrosio. Using Matilda's magic mirror, we watch her bathe, and are given a view of her "voluptuous contours and admirable symmetry" (while her mind might be childlike, the text makes clear here that her body is not, 271). We also watch as Ambrosio removes her bedclothes

---

[10] There is a reappearance here of the female-female bonds that we have already seen in Radcliffe's *The Italian* and Dacre's *Confessions*. Antonia is safe while she is with her mother, but once that mother is destroyed and Antonia is

to reveal her naked body when he steals into her room to rape her (300). While Emily's childlike qualities aren't emphasized, it seems that the female in danger is being made, by virtue of her powerless position, sexually desirable, despite being infantilized.

Antonia's desirability, based on her extreme innocence, makes her the embodiment of feminine virtue, and therefore the heroine of the text. Meanwhile, Matilda falls from grace, becoming the anti-heroine. Matilda is "bad" because she gains sexual knowledge and therefore gains courage and power, and is no longer in need of male direction. The fact that readers at the end of the tale discover that Matilda was a demon in disguise seems to further underline Lewis's horror at the idea of an independent, intelligent female: such a creature, he seems to say, cannot be human. At the same time, even as the text encourages the reader to see Antonia as a heroine, Lewis presents her innocence in such excessive terms that her behaviour borders on stupidity, ironically rendering her character into the kind of parody of virtue that we have already seen in Dacre's *The Libertine*, and that we see again in *Zofloya*. Therefore, Lewis's text gives readers a rather frightening viewpoint of what it means to be a "good" or virtuous woman. It would seem that such a woman, without sexual knowledge, and therefore, without intelligence or agency, should be under the direction of a male partner or father figure (as Ambrosio felt Matilda should be under his control). Also, the more powerless a woman is, the more sexually appealing she appears to men--even though at the same time, this powerlessness puts her in a dangerous position.

Lewis's text subscribes to a mode of writing that "situates it within an eighteenth-century literary tradition which equated feminine beauty and distress", and which further connotes its "French literary heritage" (Wright 43-44). Such works include Diderot's *La Religieuse* (1790), where the heroine seems unaware of the desire her innocence and beauty inspire in her

---

without female protection, she succumbs to Ambrosio and Matilda's schemes.

persecutors (44), and de Sade's *La Nouvelle Justine* (1797), where the virtuous, honest Justine is repeatedly raped and tortured by those in whom she places her faith (41). While the violence in both de Sade's and Lewis's works has been seen as a critique of the Roman Catholic church and all its vices, I think there is something to be said for this destruction of the virtuous female aside from religious commentary, since it appears in texts that do not include evil monks or tyrannical nuns. Ironically, this phenomenon critiques the culture's approval of such a feminine ideal at the very same time as it attempts to promote it. The innocent female who shuns sexual knowledge, while portrayed as desirable, is also a character who suffers in Radcliffe's, Lewis's and Dacre's texts. In *The Monk,* the most virtuous character comes to the worst end of all women in the novel: after her mother is murdered, she is then drugged, raped and stabbed to death.

On the other hand, we are not given a successful alternative to the virtuous heroine. It seems that there are no women worth emulating in this text, for whether virtuous or not, they are all severely punished in the novel's pages. Indeed, Lewis's treatment of his female characters has led many critics to claim that he is misogynist, since there is no female that he does not punish severely or hold in contempt[11]. Matilda, who has sexual agency, becomes a strange creature, a sort of mix between a male and a female, and is revealed to be a demon, as though Lewis has no idea of how else to imagine a woman with such agency. As for other women in the text, they are punished and demonized as well. Agnes, who shares one night of passion with the man she loves, is confined to the vaults of St. Claire's for her "crime". There she gives birth to a child that soon dies. Agnes turns into a kind of madwoman (and therefore a monster), cradling and

---

[11] Anne Williams argues that *The Monk* is an example of Lewis's (and his culture's) fear and hatred of women with power. She notes the particular viciousness of the Prioresses' murder by a lynch mob as evidence of this. Williams describes this scene as "an orgy of hatred excited by female power" (113) and that "Lewis's riot makes explicit...the fundamental kinship between the patriarchal gaze and the fear of female power as well as the relation between the spectacle of the female and the desire for control and revenge" (114). See Anne Williams, Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

speaking to her child's rotting corpse. The Bleeding Nun's crimes are more infamous, as she murders her husband, the Baron Lindenberg, in order to be with his brother. Like Lady Laurentini of Radcliffe's *Udolpho*, the Bleeding Nun succumbs to a kind of uncontrolled emotional passion, choosing murder to be with her lover. Her punishment is to wander the earth as a ghost for hundreds of years--yet another female who becomes a monster in this text. Each of these women is punished for her sexual transgressions, with the exception of Matilda, who the reader learns was never human to begin with anyway. Since Lewis seems to save his most brutal end for Antonia, perhaps the text's implicit message is that virtue is *not* the ideal. However, there is no alternative left: Lewis cannot imagine any positive female figure at all.

Charlotte Dacre -- Zofloya, or The Moor

Dacre's text, like Lewis's, focuses on the antagonist of the tale. But instead of the story being told from the viewpoint of a desiring male, the reader is given the perspective of a sexually adventurous, scheming female. Victoria, the daughter of the Marchese and the Marchesa di Loredani, is given a poor upbringing by her parents, who apparently never taught her to curb her selfish appetites. Because of Victoria's poor education, we are told she is "beautiful and accomplished as an angel [but] proud, haughty, and self-sufficient--of a wild, ardent, and irrepressible spirit, indifferent to reproof, careless of censure--of an implacable, revengeful and cruel nature, and bent upon gaining the ascendancy in whatever she engaged" (4). This early description of Victoria's character sets readers up with the same expectations as at the beginning of *Confessions*: that the heroine will be tempted by passions she is unable to resist. In the course of the narrative, Victoria poisons her husband, drugs a man into believing she is his lover in order to sleep with him, murders an innocent young orphan, and contrives to do all these things with the help of a man whom the text eventually reveals to be Satan.

Dacre follows Lewis's plot in a number of ways. The main character of each novel is befriended by a beautiful member of the opposite sex, one who turns out to be diabolical, leading his or her prey into moral destruction. Both texts have main characters who are sexually adventurous, murderous, and who are condemned to hell at the end of the novel after being flung off a mountain precipice by Satan. But the way that the two texts are different is what is most important, for Dacre chooses to make her sexual, murdering character a woman, not a man. Victoria inverts Lewis's plot by making her heroine act in the same way that Ambrosio did, except without the fear of consequences from which Ambrosio seemed to suffer. Just as Ambrosio drugged and raped Antonia, Victoria drugs and seduces Henriquez. But while Ambrosio is horrified by what he has done, finding it impossible to even look upon Antonia after he rapes her (and trying to blame her for his actions), Victoria is without guilt. When Henriquez impales himself on his own sword after discovering he has slept with Victoria, instead of feeling remorse for her actions, she is instead filled with murderous rage and seeks revenge against his lover, Lilla. Where Ambrosio indulges in his sexual desires, and then chastises his lover or victim for driving him to do so, Victoria never once regrets any of her sexual escapades, and never once succumbs to petty finger pointing at her prey. Victoria feels no need to apologize or make excuses for her sexuality, an important difference, and one that has been of interest to scholars.

It has been noted by many that *Zofloya* departs from the usual Gothic plot structure of "women [as] the objects or victims of male imagination" (Craciun 76). Of *Zofloya*, James A. Dunn writes:

> [Dacre] pays homage to "Monk" Lewis in a number of ways, but in perhaps the most important way she declares her independence from him--let us have our sex and violence,

> she seems to say, but let us see what it looks like beyond the stock feminine props of persecution and victimization; let us make women the subject rather than the object of a toxic erotic agony (308).

Victoria is described as wilful and passionate, and the text often describes her, like Matilda, as being manly: she has a "masculine spirit" (*Zofloya* 189) with "bold masculine features" (213). Like Lewis, Dacre imagines that Victoria's sexuality and agency make her into a kind of doubly sexed creature, although Dacre never goes so far as to make Victoria a demon. Like Matilda, Victoria has sexual knowledge, courage and the ability to act on her desires. But the consequences of this knowledge do not condemn her as they do Matilda. While Ambrosio no longer wants Matilda sexually, Victoria is still desirable to her lover, Berenza--he just can't bring himself to marry her. And while Matilda's diabolical state makes her redemption in the tale impossible, Victoria, with all her faults, always remains human and capable of redemption. At the end of the tale, the reader is told that if she had only abandoned Zofloya, Victoria's deception and murders would all have been forgiven. Victoria is *allowed* faults: destruction is not the only alternative for her. And those faults, it is important to note, do not stem exclusively from sexual knowledge. While it is Matilda's sexual act that turns her into an undesirable creature, Victoria's sexuality in itself is not the problem in Dacre's text. It is when she contemplates an extra-marital affair with Henriquez, and particularly when she wishes to be rid of her husband, that she seems to reach the height of her corruption, marked by Zofloya's sudden appearance.

Interestingly, the hated rival of our (anti) heroine is the chaste, virtuous Lilla. Similarly to Lewis's treatment of the ridiculously innocent Antonia, one might detect a hint of sarcasm in Dacre's description of Lilla:

> Pure, innocent, free even from the smallest taint of a corrupt thought, was her mind; delicate, symmetrical, and of fairy-like beauty, her person so small, yet of so just proportion; sweet, expressing a seraphic serenity of soul, seemed her angelic countenance (133).

The text goes on in this manner, emphasizing Lilla's "virgin rose" complexion and "flaxen hair". Lilla is the personification of the feminine ideal of innocence and sexual purity. Her tender age of thirteen is Dacre's way of emphasizing her childish innocence, though even her contemporaries would have found this excessive, considering that she has an adult lover, Henriquez. One scholar refers to Lilla as a "paedophiliac object-choice" on Henriquez's part (Michawsiw 276). Dacre wishes her heroine to appear as innocent as possible, and makes her into a child in the same way that Lewis does with Antonia, although she goes one step further. While Antonia's body was sexually mature, it seems Lilla is a child in every sense of the word: body and mind. As we have already seen with Gabrielle in *The Libertine*, Dacre is again exaggerating the virtues of her female character to prove a point. The text may extol Lilla's positive qualities, but she is hardly important enough to be visible for long in the text, and she doesn't even speak until just before her murder. Victoria holds her in contempt as a "puny babbler" (note the similarity to the image of a "prattling" Antonia) and a mere "puppet" (223).

As is the case with Radcliffe's and Lewis's virtuous heroines, the very moment of Lilla's destruction is when she is most fully perceived as a sexual object. The scene where Zofloya appears to Victoria with the lifeless Lilla in his arms emphasizes the weakness and sexuality of her body, in a voyeuristic moment similar to when Ambrosio (and the reader) watches Antonia bathe. And while this time it is a woman doing the watching (and therefore it is a woman in the

position of power), it is still a chaste, innocent female being watched. Such a female is always an object available to be viewed by others:

> Victoria contemplated, with joyous exaltation, the helpless and devoted orphan:--her fragile form lay nerveless, her snow-white arms, bare nearly to the shoulder (for a thin nightdress alone covered her,) hung down over the back of the Moor, her feet and legs resembling sculptored alabaster, were likewise bare, her languid head drooped insensible, while the long flaxen tresses; escaping from the net which had enveloped them, now partly shaded her ashy cheek, and now streamed in dishevelled luxuriance of the breeze (203).

At the moment of Lilla's murder, the reader is asked to envision her near naked on her knees before Victoria, begging for mercy. We are told her "tresses hung around her in mournful disorder...her thin hands upon her polished bosom" (223). But here as in *The Monk*, the virtuous female is not be saved by a stroke of luck or a male liberator. The weak and helpless Lilla is absolutely unable to defend herself, and like Antonia, she quickly meets her grisly doom.

While Sandra Knight-Roth makes the claim that Dacre "modified the extremes" which were found in the gory details of Lewis (6), I would argue that Dacre was just as comfortable with blood and gore as her male counterparts. The destruction of Lilla is particularly graphic and is a prime example of this. More importantly, I think it shows Victoria's (and Dacre's) disdain for the Radcliffean virtuous heroine:

> With her poignard she stabbed her in the bosom, in the shoulder, and other parts:--the expiring Lilla sank upon her knees.--Victoria pursued her blows--she covered her fair body with innumerable wounds, then dashed her headlong over the edge of the steep.--Her fairy form bounded as it fell against the projecting crags of the mountain,

diminishing to the sight of her cruel enemy, who followed it far as her eye could reach (226).

Diane Long Hoeveler, who describes this scene as written with a "pornographic frenzy" (*"Charlotte Dacre's Zofloya"* 195), notes the significance of Victoria's murder of Lilla. She writes that while Lilla is coded in the text as the model of female behaviour, she is "too polite or civilized to survive" (194), and that "to despoil the blonde hair and the white bosom of Lilla is to attack the domestic feminine ideal at its most potent core--the promise of innocent and nurturing motherhood" (196). James A. Dunn makes the same connection, noting that Victoria feels "disgust and loathing of Lilla's feminine insignificance...hence the scene of attack resonates with a symbolic intent to destroy this false feminine ideal". According to Dunn, Lilla's murder shows that Dacre believes "such *should* be the destiny of feminine passivity" (314).

However, both scholars also acknowledge that Dacre cannot help but punish Victoria, having Zofloya finally turn on her, sending her to the fiery inferno to which we assume she goes upon death. Hoeveler writes, "Victoria is the excessive and hyperbolic aristocratic woman who has finally waged open war on bourgeois values and received her just punishment" (*"Charlotte Dacre's Zofloya"* 197). And Dunn notes that while "on the one hand, there is a real ideological liberation achieved as Dacre sets her women free from the destiny of passive suffering so widely represented and accepted by Gothic conventions; on the other hand, her women shed their 'feminine' destinies...only to find themselves 'masculinized,' selfishly lusty and aggressive" (326-7).

In *Zofloya*, Dacre seems to advocate the destruction of the virtuous female, just as she does in *The Libertine*, but there is an interesting difference between her destruction of the virtuous female and Lewis's. In *The Monk*, the text's reason for destroying its feminine ideal in

Antonia is because she becomes “defiled”: she no longer functions as the embodiment of perfect femininity, and therefore, her usefulness to the text ends. But Lilla is never defiled; Dacre wants to be rid of her just as she stands: the perfect ideal. This is an important difference, for while Lewis would seem to still be suggesting that sexuality and feminine virtue are incompatible, Dacre sees Lilla’s extreme innocence and lack of sexual knowledge as enough to make her an object of contempt and worthy of destruction. Dacre doesn’t believe that it is sexual knowledge that makes the female contemptible; it is quite the opposite. Lilla’s innocence is what makes her an object of intense hatred and disgust, and is the reason she is destroyed.

As in her other texts, Dacre creates female characters that transgress boundaries of sexual decorum, yet the reader is asked to sympathize with them. This is true of both Victoria and her mother, Laurina, who abandoned her family to be with her lover, Ardolph. When Laurina is discovered near death and is brought to Leonardo and Victoria, we discover how miserable her last years have been with her lover. Ardolph turns out to be a tyrant who gambles away all their money and beats her; when she is discovered, she only lives long enough to be forgiven by Leonardo (and scorned by Victoria). Laurina may be a fallen woman, but the reader is asked to sympathize with her because of her suffering, regardless of what she has done. And it seems even Victoria could have been redeemed; if she had turned away from Zofloya, her sexual transgressions, even her murders, would have been forgiven. It is a forgiveness she does not accept, but the text suggests that the possibility was there.

The question then remains as to the stance these texts take on sexuality and virtue. As for Lewis, he seems unable to imagine a sexually transgressive female without having her become a monster in some way. He pokes fun at his virtuous female, and destroys her once she has sexual knowledge. In the end, sexual satisfaction or knowledge is not something that the virtuous

female is free to pursue. If Lewis's women happen to gain sexual knowledge, either willingly (as with Agnes or The Bleeding Nun) or unwillingly (as with Antonia) this knowledge makes the woman a monster, or, as with Antonia, makes her a character that the text doesn't know what to do with, and so she is conveniently removed. With Dacre, female sexual knowledge is at the forefront of the text, since the tale is told from the viewpoint of a sexually aggressive woman. And Dacre, too, feels she must punish her sexual heroines, as she does with both Victoria and her mother. As Hoeveler and Dunn note, Dacre is unable to allow her transgressive females a happy ending.

However, readers cannot ignore the fact that Dacre is at least willing to imagine a tale in which a woman does all the desiring, instead of being simply an object of desire. Victoria does not hide in shame of her sexuality: she is indeed quite comfortable with it. She is also not a coward about her sexuality or her violent nature, as Lewis's Ambrosio is. Victoria never tries to blame anyone else for her murders or for succumbing to her sexual desires. And as I have already noted, while Lewis's text destroys or punishes all females with sexual knowledge, particularly the virtuous heroine, Dacre's text is different in that it utterly destroys the virtuous heroine for *not* having sexual knowledge. This is an extremely important difference, for Lewis clearly cannot accept a sexual female, while Dacre cannot accept a female so empty of real emotion as to *not* have or desire sexual experience.

Perhaps Dacre takes beliefs about the sexual woman one step forward by having her text written from the point of view of a desiring woman, and then takes things two steps back by making her uncontrollably violent and "manly". But at the very least, she made the attempt to imagine a sexual woman, giving her female character a kind of courage that Lewis certainly could not imagine.

Conclusion

When I initially began work on this thesis, I already had my conclusion in mind. I planned to explain that Radcliffe's and Lewis's heroines were passive victims, while Dacre's heroines were comfortable with their own sexuality and had complete control over the events that befell them in the novels. There would be a clear demarcation between what Dacre had accomplished as a feminist writer, and the writing of her contemporaries. Upon reading and re-reading the texts, and much thought, I came to the conclusion that this was simply not the case. Perhaps it was naïve of me to hope it would be so.

This does not mean that Dacre works with the same ideologies as Radcliffe or Lewis, because this is also not the case. She does, however, have heroines who are unable to have successful sexual relationships. The reason for this is, I believe, because Dacre is writing in the same cultural context as Lewis and Radcliffe. It would be unfair to expect her to write stories of women ignoring social codes of conduct, having sex with whomever they wanted, and not facing any consequences for their escapades. Dacre must be honest with herself and with her readers. Cazire could never have a relationship with Fribourg without some cost. Her reputation would be ruined, a fact that would ostracize her from society, and she would carry the guilt of Elinore's abandonment and destitution. Interestingly, she takes the responsibility for this, acting as though it is her decision, and not Fribourg's, that will ruin his family--a reflection of how women were expected to curb their sexual appetites, while men were expected to have difficulty controlling them (and therefore were not to blame). In *The Libertine*, Dacre again shows that women of her culture are unable to have power in sexual relationships. Gabrielle's affair with Angelo leaves her pregnant and without the financial means to care for herself or her son. Meanwhile, Angelo has an abundance of sexual adventures at her expense. The surface level of the text uses this

scenario to paint Gabrielle as a martyr, a heroine who is taken advantage of, and a woman to pity. But Gabrielle's weakness makes her a pathetic object rather than a woman to be emulated. However, there is another point to be made as well. Gabrielle, like Cazire, needs to find a man to financially support her. Gabrielle, ruined in the eyes of society by her status as a single mother, can only hope for the pity of Angelo. *The Libertine* illustrates two things: first, a woman's clinging to ideals of virtue is a useless endeavor, even if her culture applauds her for it. Virtue does not provide any personal success for heroines, and in fact, following its dictates seems to only lead women into dangerous situations. Second, a woman's choice of lover is often influenced by her need for financial security.

Zofloya is quite different from Dacre's other novels in its plot's adherence to horror rather than romance. It is similar, however, in its illustration of the frustrations women face in their attempts at sexual equality. Victoria takes a lover, Berenza, without feeling the need to marry him. However, while she at first feels she can ignore social mores, she discovers she is still judged by them. Berenza cannot marry a woman he loves but still believes to be "infamous". Victoria's rage at this discovery is to be expected, and the text points to the irony of such a man as Berenza, who has several lovers, passing judgment on Victoria. However, in this irony, Dacre makes a point that she has made in her other novels: men are allowed a freedom in sexuality that women are not. Both Victoria and her mother are punished severely for their attempts at sexual freedom and happiness. These instances of women being ostracized, punished and left destitute after attempting to have sexual freedom are found in Dacre as well as in Radcliffe and Lewis.

But it is how Dacre's text differs from her contemporaries that is what makes her important to the study of Gothic literature from a feminist perspective. Regardless of whether or not they fail, Dacre's heroines at least make an active attempt at sexual freedom. Such women

are made into selfish and dangerous anti-heroines in Radcliffe's texts, and madwomen or monsters in Lewis's. Radcliffe and Lewis can't imagine that a woman can have a sexual appetite without also being greedy and power-hungry (like Madam Cheron), insane (like Lady Laurentini and Agnes), or suffers from an unnatural libido, a sign of her monstrosity (like Matilda). Dacre's women are not flat characters who are purely evil, weak or mad. Cazire is a young woman who considers the balance of issues surrounding her own sexuality. Gabrielle serves as an example of what can happen in a world where men are not expected to be responsible for their sexuality, while women are left to suffer (and are even encouraged to suffer, by being celebrated as martyrs when they are victimized). Victoria is unique amongst Dacre's heroines in that her list of crimes includes murder and collusion with Satan. However, her character's sexuality is not the focus of the text's condemnation of her; even with all her faults, the text makes the point that she was still a candidate for redemption.

While Dacre would enjoy financial success, her work in the Gothic genre was at the cost of any respect in the literary realm; her pseudonym of Rosa Matilda became synonymous with the worst kind of hack writing of the period, and because of this, she would endure harsh criticism from literary critics.[12] Part of this failure to receive critical acclaim might have been because Dacre associated herself with Matthew Lewis when she wrote *Zofloya*, a move that would have openly (and courageously) announced her approval of an infamous work. Her insistence in writing her poetry in the Della Cruscan style long after it was considered popular also would not have helped her to be taken seriously as a writer of literature (Wilson 398).

---

[12] Byron was known "to employ "Rosa Matilda" as a kind of shorthand for everything in contemporary literature against which he set his own work". His unflattering satire of Dacre in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809) "became one of the most influential voices in the critical movement to caricature [Dacre]". Decades later, even Edgar Allan Poe was aware of Dacre's pseudonym. Writing in 1842 about literature he found "nauseating", he complained that such works suffered from "Rosa-matilda effusions". See Lisa M. Wilson, "Female Pseudonymity in the Romanic "Age of Personality": The Career or Charlotte King/Rosa Matilda/Charlotte Dacre". European Romantic Review. 9.3 (1998): 393-420.

However, I would argue that while Dacre did little to help herself win acceptance from literary critics, this is probably not the only reason her work was not taken seriously. Dacre's culture did not want to read stories about women who pursued sexual relationships. While Radcliffe's text *Udolpho*, with its sexually frigid heroine, was referenced by authors from Keats to Austen (Dobrée 1-2), Dacre's work would fall by the wayside. It was clear that Dacre's culture was much more comfortable reading about heroines who were unable to express themselves sexually than ones who looked to have sexual agency. And considering the sexual climate of the period, where a woman's sexuality was feared, perhaps this cannot come as a surprise. However, this makes Dacre's achievements in terms of sales and translations of her books rather intriguing. While contemporary scholars and "serious" writers would abandon Dacre to obscurity, the fact that Dacre's books sold so well shows that there was a curiosity, perhaps even a need among women to read about heroines such as Dacre's. Even though Dacre would be chastised for what she wrote, she continued to write novels that dared to create female characters that thought, felt and did things that her contemporaries would dare not imagine. Continuing in her work in both poetry and prose regardless of what her critics said, and openly admitting that she was influenced by Matthew Lewis, illustrates that Dacre was willing to pursue her work even at the cost of literary acclaim, and even if it meant she would have to hide behind pseudonyms. This shows Dacre's conviction in the importance of her work. While having been forgotten until the 20th century[13], Dacre has finally resurfaced to become an author of interest to scholars of Gothic literature, and rightly so. Her work is important because of its contribution to feminist readings of eighteenth and nineteenth century English literature and culture.

[13] After disappearing from the literary scene for hundreds of years, Dacre resurfaced at the beginning of the twentieth century. Sandra Knight-Roth credits Montague Summers with resurrecting Dacre when he had *Zofloya*

Bibliography

Anolik, Ruth Bienstock. "The Missing Mother: The Meanings of Maternal Absence in the Gothic Mode". Modern Language Studies. 33.1-2 (2003): 24-43

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1971.

Chodorow, Nancy. The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

Clery, E.J. "The Politics of the Gothic Heroine in the 1790s". Reviewing Romanticism. Eds. Philip W. Martin and Robin Jarvis. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. 69-85.

Craciun, Adriana. Fatal Women of Romanticism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

--. "I hasten to be disembodied: Charlotte Dacre, the Demon Lover, and Representations of the Body." European Romantic Review. 6.1 (1995): 75-97.

Dacre, Charlotte. Confessions of the Nun of St. Omer. New York: Arno Press, 1972.

--. The Libertine. New York: Arno Press, 1974.

--. Zofloya, or The Moor. Kim Ian Michasiw, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Dobrée, Bonamy. "Introduction". Ann Radcliffe. The Mysteries of Udolpho. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Dunn, James A. "Charlotte Dacre and the Feminization of Violence." Nineteenth Century Literature. 53.3 (1998): 307-327.

Gamer, Michael. "Genres for the Prosecution: Pornography and the Gothic". PMLA. 114.5 (1999): 1043-1054.

---

reprinted in 1928.

Greenfield, Susan C. "Veiled Desire: Mother-Daughter Love and Sexual Imagery in Ann Radcliffe's The Italian." The Eighteenth Century. 33:1 (1992): 73-89.

--. "Introduction". Mothering Daughters: Novels and the Politics of Family Romance, Frances Burney to Jane Austen. Detroit: Wayne University Press. 2003.

Godwin, William. Enquiry Concerning Political Justice. K. Codell Carter, ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

Haggerty, George E. "Mothers and Other Lovers: Gothic Fictions and the Erotics of Loss". Eighteenth Century Fiction. 16.2 (2004):157-172.

Hoeveler, Diane Long. "Charlotte Dacre's Zofloya: A Case Study in Miscegenation as Sexual and Racial Nausea." European Romantic Review 8.2 (1997): 185-199.

--. Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998.

Johnson, Claudia L. Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s: Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Kahane, Claire. "The Gothic Mirror," The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation. London: Cornell University Press Ltd, 1995. 334-351.

Kipp, Julie. Romanticism, Maternity, and the Body Politic. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Knight-Roth, Sandra. "Charlotte Dacre and the Gothic Tradition." (unpublished thesis, Dalhousie Univ., 1972).

Kullman, Thomas. “Defeats of Reason in the Gothic Novel: Literary and Political Discourses at the Time of the French Revolution”. Symbolism: An International Journal of Critical Aesthetics. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 2000.

Lewis, Matthew. The Monk. Howard Anderson, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Mellor, Anne K. Romanticism and Gender. New York: Routledge, 1993.

--. Mothers of the Nation: Women’s Political Writing in England, 1780-1830. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Michasiw, Kim Ian. “Notes”. Zofloya, or The Moor. Kim Ian Michasiw, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Nussbaum, Felicity. Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Radcliffe, Ann. The Italian: or the Confessional of the Black Penitents. London: Penguin Books, 2000.

--. The Mysteries of Udolpho. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Runge, Laura L. “Beauty and Gallantry: A Model of Polite Conversation Revisited”. Eighteenth-Century Life 25.4 (2001): 43–63.

Shaffer, Julie. “The High Cost of Female Virtue: The Sexualization of Female Agency in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Texts” Misogyny in Literature: An Essay Collection. New York: Garland Publishing, 1992.

“The Libertine, Review ”. Corvey Women Writers on the Web. November 1999. April 10, 2005. <http://www2.shu.ac.uk/corvey/CW3/ContribPage.cfm?Contrib=195>.

Wilson, Lisa M. “Female Pseudonymity in the Romanic “Age of Personality”: The

Career or Charlotte King/Rosa Matilda/Charlotte Dacre". European Romantic Review. 9.3 (1998): 393-420.

Williams, Anne. Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Wright, Angela. "Disruptions of the Idealized Woman." European Gothic: A Spirited Exchange 1760-1960. Avril Horner, ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. A vindication of the rights of woman, with strictures on political and moral subjects. Boston: Peter Edes for Thomas and Andrews, 1792. 20 August 2005. <http:// www.bartleby.com/144/>.